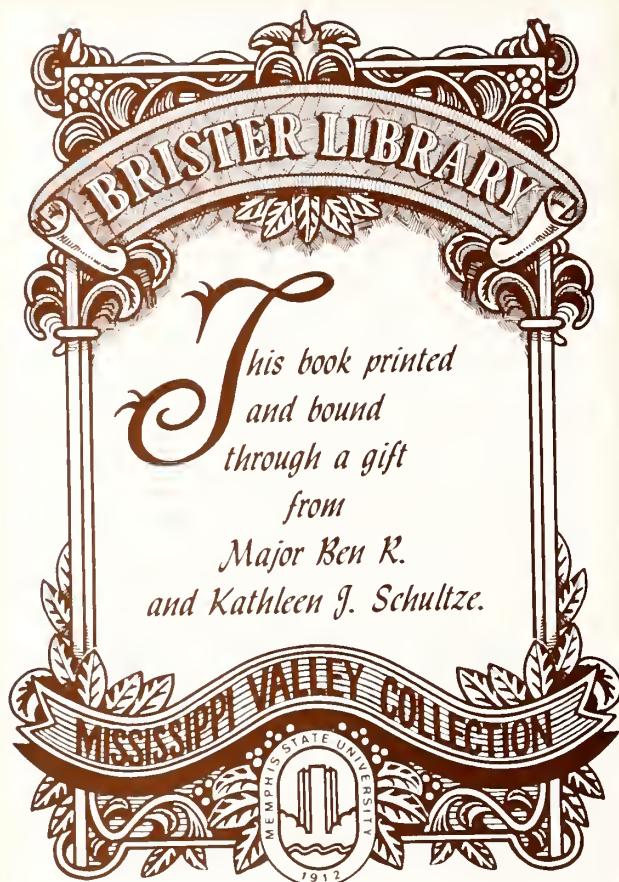


"ROBERT CHURCH FAMILY OF MEMPHIS"
INTERVIEWS WITH
ROBERTA CHURCH AND ANNETTE E. CHURCH

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD
TRANSCRIBERS: PHYLLIS SIMS, SHARON HESSE
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INTERVIEWS WITH ROBERTA CHURCH AND ANNETTE E. CHURCH

JANUARY 4, 1973

JULY 10, 1973

BY

CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

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That these interviews shall not be available to any person without my written consent for a period of ten years. At the expiration of ten years this stipulation will end unless it is renewed either by Roberta Church or Annette E. Church.

PLACE Washington, D. C.

DATE August 19, 1974

Annette E. Church
(Interviewee) Roberta Church

Charles W. Crawford
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE ROBERT CHURCH FAMILY OF MEMPHIS." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS JANUARY 4, 1973, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MISS ANNETTE CHURCH AND MISS ROBERTA CHURCH, PRESENTLY LIVING IN WASHINGTON, D. C. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE, AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MISS PHYLLIS SIMS.

CRAWFORD: I believe it would be well if we started as early as possible with the history of the Church family, and the earlier contributions will be by Miss Annette Church. And first we will get some information about the early family history, starting at the beginning, and then dealing with the career of Robert Church, Sr. Miss Church, if you will give us some of that information now, we will start the record.

A. CHURCH: Robert R. Church, Sr. was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, June 18, 1839. He spent his childhood with his mother who was of Malay ancestry, her mother being the daughter of a royal family of one of the Malay Islands, who was taken prisoner during civil strife and was sold to a slave ship. His mother moved to Arkansas. She died when he was twelve years old. His father was Captain Charles B. Church who owned a line of steamboats. After his mother's death, Captain Church took my father and he sailed up and down the Mississippi River with him until he was a grown man. My father had regularly visited Memphis since childhood, but settled in Memphis after he escaped from the steamer, Victoria, where he worked as a steward during the Battle of



Memphis, June 6, 1862. He married my mother, Miss Anna Wright, on January 1, 1885. Father George White, former rector of Calvary Episcopal Church, performed the ceremony, and the wedding was held at her home on Elliott Street--it's now Butler Avenue--near Fourth street. My mother was one of the two members of the first graduating class of LeMoyne-Normal Institute in 1876. She taught in the Memphis schools and then became principal at Auction Street School in North Memphis. My parents spent their honeymoon in New Orleans as guest of Governor and Mrs. Pinchback who entertained them with an elaborate reception. Two children were born in this marriage: my brother, Robert R. Church, Jr., and myself. My father died on August 29, 1912, and my mother died on October 29, 1928.

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, can you tell something about your recollection of the family's home? Where it was located, what it was like, and what you remember about the surrounding part of Memphis at the time.

A. CHURCH: Well, the house was located at 384 S. Lauderdale and it was of the Queen Anne style of architecture and was three stories high. On the first floor it contained five rooms, one was a double parlor, and there were halls that ran through the center of the house. On the second floor were five bedrooms; one servant's room and four family rooms. On the third floor situated like the first floor was a long double room and two rooms. It had a basement and a servant's house and a laundry on the back, and some horse stables and a large lot. The lot the house was built on ran back to the next street which was Humphrey.



On Humphrey Street there was a tenant house which we rented out.

CRAWFORD: What about the decoration of the house, Miss Church? What do you remember about the interior?

A. CHURCH: Well, I remember that the parlor was hand painted by French artists and it was a room that was double and had double fireplaces and the walls were frescoed by a French artist.

CRAWFORD: Do you know if any photographs of the interior now exist?

A. CHURCH: Yes, I believe I have some somewhere.

CRAWFORD: I hope they will be included in your papers if not in your book in illustration. What else about the furnishings and the interior do you remember?

A. CHURCH: There were lace curtains on bay windows that were very elaborate. At that time, you do not hear about them any more, there were Brussels carpets on the floor made of velvet and chandeliers--two crystal ones--in that room (the parlor). There was a large oil painting of the boat (the Bulletin) that he was on when it exploded and caught fire.

CRAWFORD: Now was that similar to the painting later in the Church audirotium?

A. CHURCH: Yes, the drop curtains he had made after that were of the Bulletin, but this was an oil painting by an artist he had commissioned. This boat was also reproduced on the auditorium drop curtain.

CRAWFORD: Yes, what date were you born and what was the date of your brother's birth?

A. CHURCH: My father married, as I told you, January 1, 1885, and my brother was born October 26, 1885. I was born in 1887, the 6th of August.

CRAWFORD: Did you live in Memphis until you went away to school?

A. CHURCH: Yes. I went to Europe when I was two years old. The family toured Europe and I was taken.

CRAWFORD: That was about 1888 or 1889, I guess.

A. CHURCH: Yes, 1889.--(must be 1889 if she was 2 yrs. old) I was two years old I remember. My mother said I was two.

CRAWFORD: Where did you go to school in Memphis?

A. CHURCH: Well, I had a private teacher then I registered at Miss Hook's Kindergarten, and then I went to a private school, and I went to a parish school for a short time that my family participated in.

The parish school was the old Canfield Orphan Asylum which is now a home, I think for old men. The parish school was out there on Dunlap Street which is now an old men's home. Mrs. Canfield--it was Canfield Orphan Asylum originally--was a very wealthy lady here and when she died she left it to our church (Emmanuel Episcopal Church). The Bishop had no business to take it away from us but he did. Bishop Gailor.

CRAWFORD: When did you go away to school?

A. CHURCH: When I went away to school my mother took us to Oberlin and lived there for a while. At first we went to the public school in Oberlin, because I was too young to stay in the dormitory so they wouldn't take me and later I entered Oberlin Academy and graduated in 1906. Then I went in to the college at Oberlin also. I went to the Senior class when my father got sick and I stayed home the next year and I didn't go back.

CRAWFORD: How did you travel there? Did you go by train?

A. CHURCH: By train, and my brother attended the same schools with me excepting he went to Morgan Park Academy outside of Chicago and then when he got grown he went to Packard Business College in New York City.

CRAWFORD: Was that in the early 1900's also?

A. CHURCH: Yes, that was in the early 1900's. I graduated from Oberlin

Academy in 1906. They don't have classes anymore at the Academy.

CRAWFORD: But the college is still there?

A. CHURCH: Oh, yes.

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, what do you recollect of the nature of the neighborhood in which you grew up at 384 S. Lauderdale?

A. CHURCH: Well, Postmaster Arnold lived next door to us and Mr. McKellar lived up the street in the next block. He later became Senator.

CRAWFORD: Senator Kenneth McKellar.

A. CHURCH: Yes, that's who he was. He and Robert, my brother, became very fast friends because when my brother was a little child he used to stop and talk to him.

CRAWFORD: I believe they remained friends throughout your brother's life although they were in different political parties, I know.

A. CHURCH: Yes, they were in different political parties but they were close friends since McKellar had known him since childhood. Summerfield had two stores on Main Street--a very prominent man. There

were two brothers and each of them had a store. J. Summerfield and I. Summerfield and after Armour died Summerfield moved into the house next to us. The other brother moved into the brick house that used to be across the street. Shanks, a wholesale grocer on Front Street, lived across the street from us and the family's still in business now. Now there was a colored family in the block with us down the street named Savage and Mr. Savage was at one time a member of the school board. He has two daughters still living here. Across the street from McKellar, Mrs. Hooks had her school. And Wallace was a city councilman--he was a colored man.

CRAWFORD: Is it correct to describe that as one of the best residential areas of Memphis at the time?

A. CHURCH: Well, I guess one of them. I think in those days Memphis wasn't as segregated as it became later. The corner of Vance was very exclusive. Mrs. Goldsmith lived over there, Mulford the jeweler, and Grovsner, who was the son-in-law of Napoleon Hill and the president of the street car company. This gentleman was living down on Vance Street as were a lot of prominent people. When my father died the lady who sang at his funeral was white (Mrs. Mudge) and she had moved from Vance Street because her family had disinherited her or something--I don't know what it was--and she moved next door to us. Next door to us was lived this prominent woman by the name of Mrs. Mudge in a boarding house, which only had very exclusive people living there. This lady moved there since she and her family had trouble and she moved out of the mansion on Vance Street. She was very fond of my

father and everybody in Memphis was against her but my father took sides with her and she was very fond of him, and when he died she asked if she could sing at his funeral. She was a noted vocalist and she had her training in New York. She had refused to sing at other places, but she came over and asked my mother if there was anything she could do and my mother told her no, there was nothing she could do and she said, "I'd like to sing at his funeral." Mama said she couldn't refuse her so she was the only person that sang at his funeral, and she was white.

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, what arrangements were made for the funeral?

A. CHURCH: Mr. Holst at that time was the prominent undertaker here and he and my father were fast friends and he for years had been the undertaker that buried all colored people when they died here because there was no other undertaker. In the meantime, Mr. Hayes formed an undertaking business and he was my father's friend so my father was sick at the time and Mr. Holst had to leave town so Mr. Holst called all his employees in and told them that my father was one of his best friends and if he passed away while he was gone he wanted them to give the same attention to his funeral that he would give to him if he died. But my father--you see, Mr. Hayes was colored--had promised Mr. Hayes that we would select him for the funeral. Everyone didn't know what was going to happen because of the friendship that existed between my father and Mr. Holst and they knew he was a friend of Mr. Hayes also so he called in Mr. Hayes and told him what he wanted. Afterward Mr. Holst became Holst and Hinton and they

were the most prominent undertakers here in the city. Hinton is now running the establishment.

CRAWFORD: What do you remember about social life when you were a child? Did your father entertain much? Were business associates or friends by much?

A. CHURCH: He was a member of the Whist Club and Mr. Hayes was a member and their wives. They played whist and they entertained once a year. Mr Settle was also a member.

CRAWFORD: Were people from out of town or relatives visitors often?

A. CHURCH: Well, we haven't got many relatives, My father didn't have any; all of my mother's relatives were here. My father had a half-brother who died before I was born but there were no children. He was a bachelor. His grave is out there on our lot.

CRAWFORD: Can you tell me something about your father's friends from the Pre-Civil War days that he made while he worked on the boat?

A. CHURCH: Mr. Bruce who later became senator from Mississippi was one.

CRAWFORD: He was the first former slave who later became senator, I believe.

A. CHURCH: I think so. I've got some information on him. You know his wife, Mrs. Bruce, was very, very fair in complexion. She would visit our house and she and my mother would go uptown shopping and when they got ready to sell the plantation after he died, she was trying to get the value of the land, and some of them, my mother said, would tell her such and such and ask her where it was and she'd tell them Josephine, Mississippi, and of course that gave it away. They didn't know who my mother was and this plantation was named after her (Mrs. Bruce).

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, can you tell a little more about the visit of Mrs. Bruce to your mother and their trip uptown to ask about land values?

A. CHURCH: Yes, Mrs. Bruce was very fair skinned and caucasian-looking and so was my mother and when she got ready to sell her plantation she came here and visited all of these real estate dealers and she was trying to find the value of the land. She found out that when she told them where it was--Josephine, Mississippi--they knew who she was and she didn't get the true value of the land. So she and my mother went uptown to the real estate dealers and didn't tell them who they were and my mother said on one occasion that a dealer asked where the land was located and Mrs. Bruce had to tell him and he said it wasn't as valuable as I thought it was. The Bruces were frequent visitors to our home because he had to come down here to see about his plantation and my father bought the supplies for the plantation. I know one time he had a very fine one--it was so large you had to

ride because you couldn't walk the entire distance. He bought a riding horse and named him for me, Annette Elaine Church, but he called the horse "Annette". The Bruces were accepted socially in Washington by the Government officials and other white friends. I remember the New York World published an article about him being a familiar sight walking down Pennsylvania Avenue. You see a boy (Sen. Bruce) from Mississippi walking down the street arm in arm with L.Q.C. Lamar, a noted Mississippi aristocrat and civic leader.

CRAWFORD: I believe L.Q.C. Lamar was a senator also for a while and then entered the president's cabinet later from there.

A. CHURCH: Yet, but to the people they were so noticeable and the Bruces were socially accepted. Now Mr. Bruce was a distinct colored person and very fine looking. I remember him as a child.

CRAWFORD: You remember his visiting in your home?

A. CHURCH: Oh, yes. He used to play games with us. He liked children. He only had one, Roscoe Bruce.

CRAWFORD: So you remember meeting the Pinchbacks from Louisiana?

A. CHURCH: Oh, yes. My brother has a silver fork and spoon set that Governor Pinchback gave him when he was born--a child's set, you know. It is a sterling silver knife, fork, and spoon and it's inscribed.

CRAWFORD: They ~~had~~ known one another when they worked on the river,
I believe.

A. CHURCH: Yes, they were lifelong friends.

CRAWFORD: Mr. Pinchback went to New Orleans and your father went to
Memphis.

A. CHURCH: My father was in New Orleans, too. He worked on boats
running from Memphis to New Orleans. They kept up their
friendship.

CRAWFORD: With what other people did your father keep up a friend-
ship that you remember?

A. CHURCH: Bruce and Colonel Lewis from New Orleans and Pichback--
he kept up those three.

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CRAWFORD: Miss Church, I know that Robert Church, Sr., was noted mainly for business success but he also had some contact with politics, of course. Could you give some information about that?

A. CHURCH: Although my father was a staunch Republican his name was rarely associated with politics because he had his major achievement in business. However, he accepted a draft to run for public office in Memphis in 1882. He declined to run for Fire and Police Commissioner but finally accepted the draft to run for election of the Board of Public Works. He was endorsed for Postmaster at Memphis in 1881 by citizens of both races including H. B. Ramsey, Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives at that time. He was a delegate from Memphis to the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia in 1900 which nominated William McKinley for President.

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, concerning your father's service at the Convention of 1900 when William McKinley was nominated, what was done in the press? Was that recorded in the colored press of the time?

A. CHURCH: Yes, it was recorded in the Colored American and other papers but the Colored American (published in Washington, D. C.) said that he was selected and praised the Republican Party for selecting him.

CRAWFORD: I believe that was very unusual for a Negro delegate from the South to be selected at that time.

A. CHURCH: Yes, it was.

CRAWFORD: Do you have any information that was written later about that?

A. CHURCH: Yes, the Colored American stated in the February 16, 1901, issue, "In the early days when the Negro was first enfranchised he was a fearless leader of the black voters and many times took his life in his hands while insisting upon the full and free exercise of their rights at the polls."

CRAWFORD: And that was from the February 16 issue?

A. CHURCH: It was. 1901.

CRAWFORD: So you know that your father helped black voters to register and to participate?

A. CHURCH: Yes, I remember that.

CRAWFORD: I know that Memphis had a large percentage, unusually large for the South, of Negro voters who participated through the latter part of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th. I'm glad to know of your father's part. Some writers have indicated that Boss Crump was responsible for this, but I don't think he came along in time to have had much to do with it. Did your father attend any other conventions to your knowledge? I know your brother did.

A. CHURCH: I don't know of any but he always contributed to the political campaigns.

CRAWFORD: Was Church Auditorium used for political rallies and meetings while your father was still alive?

A. CHURCH: Yes, including President Roosevelt's entertainment there.

CRAWFORD: Yes, that was in 1902. Did your father, to your knowledge, contribute to campaigns that were national as well as local? Did he contribute to Presidential or statewide campaigns?

A. CHURCH: Yes, I think he did.

CRAWFORD: Then he was a Republican throughout all of his life?

A. CHURCH: All of his life.

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, can you give some anecdotes about your father's activities of Memphis? For example, was his support limited to black groups, was it limited to Episcopal groups; if not, what else did he do?

A. CHURCH: He contributed to every worthy cause that needed help. I have letters written him from the Sisters of the St. Peter's Orphan Asylum thanking him for money that was sent to them without request and from many, many churches thanking him for donations. He didn't make any difference as to denomination or color and he used to supply a carriage and horse and driver to different priests at churches to make calls on their sick parishioners.

CRAWFORD: That was during the winter months?

A. CHURCH: Yes, I guess. Or in bad weather when they had to make calls on their parishioners.

CRAWFORD: Did he do that for churches other than his own church?

A. CHURCH: Yes, he did that for many churches. I have letters of thanks they wrote to him. Regardless of denomination or color-- it didn't make any difference.

CRAWFORD: What contact did your father have with Bishop Denby's status?

A. CHURCH: Bishop Denby was Priest at Emmanuel Church and he was the first black man made Suffragan Bishop in the Episcopal Church, and he's now passed on but he was the Suffragan Bishop of Arkansas of the Southern District--I think, of Arkansas. When he was Priest at Emmanuel Church my father used to send him checks, just send him a check, and so one Sunday he got up in church and announced that he had received this check from Mr. Church and he didn't know what it was for. He had called him up and asked him what the check was for--he had sent him \$100--and he said that's the way he is. My father told me he thought it was time he was sending something since the time had come in his life when he could send donations to different churches.

CRAWFORD: Did the two men remain friends?

A. CHURCH: Until death - throughout life.

CRAWFORD: What was the relationship, Miss Church, between your father and Booker T. Washington?

A. CHURCH: Although my father didn't agree with his philosophy they were very close friends and Booker T. Washington was the last person to see him alive. He called at the house, I think it was the day before he passed, and although my father had a different philosophy from Booker T. Washington he was one of the first members of the National Negro Business League that Booker T. Washington founded. When Booker Washington visited Memphis in November, 1909, my father

A. CHURCH: prepared the arrangements and program for his visit and
(cont'd)
I have a program of this.

CRAWFORD: Was it a very elaborate occasion?

A. CHURCH: It was a very elaborate occasion. They had a breakfast arrangement for him at Church's Park and the mayor spoke, Mayor James H. Malone.

CRAWFORD: Do you know how your father met Booker T. Washington?

A. CHURCH: No, I do not.

CRAWFORD: But they were personally acquainted before this visit in 1909?

A. CHURCH: Oh, yes. They had been friends a long time.

CRAWFORD: Do you remember meeting Booker T. Washington or seeing him at the home?

A. CHURCH: I saw him at the home when he came before my father died. I remember that because that was when I was home from school.

CRAWFORD: Do you know if your father ever discussed policies for the advancement of colored people with Booker T. Washington?

A. CHURCH: I don't know about the discussions but they were in total disagreement on the policy.

CRAWFORD: Do you know the things they disagreed about? Do you know how your father differed with Booker T. Washington about the best policies for the advancement of colored people?

A. CHURCH: Booker Washington believed in industrialism--doing things with your hands--and my father believed in civic things like ballots and voting and higher education.

CRAWFORD: Miss Church, I'm impressed by the extent of your father's friendships and connections. It seems to me that there was something of a Negro leadership elite throughout the nation in the latter part of the century after the Civil War of people who were achieving success in different areas of the South, in Washington, and in the northern states, and your father apparently knew many of them. Can you elaborate on that?

A. CHURCH: Yes, some of the older ones, and all these I'm going to mention were guests in our home: Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist in slavery times; John M. Langston, Congressman from Virginia whose daughter married James C. Napier of Nashville, the Register of the Treasury; Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, the first man to operate on the heart and one of my father's physicians; Bishop Tanner, whose son was the famous artist who has a picture hanging in the Louvre--his son's name was Henry O. Tanner. My mother's mother,

A. CHURCH: Jane Wright, was a great friend of Frederick Douglass.
(Cont'd)

He always stopped in her home when he came to Memphis or passed through Memphis. My mother knew him as a young lady and I saw him several times. I was afraid of old people all my life and as a child I used to show it so my mother cautioned me that Frederick Douglass was coming and not to make any comments in his presence about his looks. So when he came I was reluctant to greet him, but anyhow, my mother cautioned me again so when he came back the second time I ran up and kissed him and then I told Mother that he had large eyes and commented on his looks after he left. But she always cautioned me about making remarks about how he looked. He had this long white hair and wore these suits with these long coats called Prince Albert, but it was long and white and he looked distinct from other men, and I was afraid of old people always. I don't know why.

CRAWFORD: Robert Church, Sr., had a very active public life and assured a lot of leadership. I know he must have spent a great deal of time in these things, but could you tell something, also, about the sort of relationship he maintained with his family during all of this?

A. CHURCH: He loved children and loved his family very much. Every Sunday he would take me and my brother by my grandmother's house, my mother's mother, and leave us and my mother would come too. She had a great big yard and her other grandchildren, my uncle's children would come there to play. He would always have his pockets full of nickels and give every child a nickel - a five cent piece. They

A. CHURCH: expected him to come and give a nickel and they would
(Cont'd) always be there. He was very generous, as I told you, and
he used to have prescriptions filled for sick people when he didn't
think they could afford it.

CRAWFORD: What other anecdotes do you remember about your father's
family relationships?

A. CHURCH: Well, my friend with whom I was growing up and I were
asked which parent we loved the best. She said she loved
her mother the best, and I said I loved my parents the same - I loved
my mother and father just the same - and I was telling my father and
mother about it and my father said, "Come here, I want to tell you
something. I don't ever want you to say that again. I want you to
say that you love your mother best because I'm second and want her
to be first in everything and always remember that I'm second--she
comes first."

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE ROBERT CHURCH FAMILY OF MEMPHIS." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS JULY 10, 1973. THE INTERVIEW, AT THE BEGINNING, IS WITH MS. ROBERTA CHURCH. LATER WE'LL INVOLVE MS. ANNETTE CHURCH. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE, AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MS. SHARON HESSE.

CRAWFORD Ms. Church, I suggest that we start by getting a little information about Robert Church's position and accomplishments in 1940. Can you sum up something of his background and his standing in the city at that time?

R. CHURCH I guess one might say that by 1940 my father was a respected and recognized Republican leader in Memphis, the state of Tennessee, and the nation, not only among colored Republicans, but among Republican leaders in the state and national party and also on the local scene. He had by 1940 been delegate from Memphis to eight Republican national conventions. He was a member of the Republican State Executive Committee for many years by this time, having been successively elected to this position every two years. He had been involved in, I think, all national Republican campaigns from 1912 up until 1940. He was in the real estate business managing the property that he had inherited from his father, who was my grandfather, and he had been active in many other community affairs throughout this period of his lifetime, let us say: the NAACP, the IBPOE of W, which is the colored Elks, and other civic

organizations. He had, I think, also received certain honorable recognition in the press as to his pioneering in the registration and encouragement of colored citizens to use the ballot, and this, of course, was long before this particular type of activity had received the prominence in the press that it has today.

CRAWFORD So by 1940 his position was a prominent one in the colored community in Memphis and in the Republican Party, not just in Tennessee, but the entire South.

R. CHURCH I think one might say that, and I think one might say that as far as the colored press and colored race was concerned, his stature in the Republican Party and as a civic leader and a political leader had reached national proportions.

CRAWFORD Can we go, then, to the events during the election year of 1940, of his activity and what happened as a result of it?

R. CHURCH In 1940 it appeared that Wendell Willkie, who was the Republican nominee for president, might make great inroads on the Democratic Party, and it appeared for the first time that President Roosevelt might have a rather formidable opponent. This was particularly true in Memphis where, I think, many people were becoming disenchanted with the local leadership of the Democratic Party. And as usual, my father was involved in the national campaign and was responsible for the development of campaign organization in Memphis and Shelby County, and he was also responsible for organizing some of the colored voters in other states at this time. So since he was going to be out of town during part of the campaign, he authorized Dr. J. B. Martin,

who was a longtime ally and a staunch friend of his and had been active in the Republican Party in Memphis for many years--Dr. Martin was also a very prominent druggist and leader in the community--to take over chairmanship, I guess one might call it, of the Republican organization in Memphis among the colored voters. And as I say, this was due to the fact that my father was going to be in the eastern and northern portions of the country trying to assist in organizing the colored voters there.

Well, as is customary in political campaigns, rallies were planned in October and November to promote the interest of the particular candidate or the Party, which happened to be Mr. Willkie. And prior to, I think, October, Mr. Willkie had announced in the press that there was not a Mayor Hague, who was, you know, from New Jersey, or a Boss Pendergast, who, I think, was from Kansas City, or a Boss Crump, among his supporters.

This, of course, was rather distasteful, I guess one might say, to Mr. Crump, who was the political leader in Memphis and the state at that time among the Democrats, and Mr. Crump answered in the press that he would not vote for Mr. Willkie anyway, even if Mr. Willkie was a Democrat, because Mr. Willkie was not for the people. So one sees at this point the beginning of some hostility between the candidacy of Mr. Willkie and Mr. Crump.

Well, of course when the colored population began to attend these rallies and added to that, and it looked also as though many white people in Memphis were interested in Mr. Willkie's candidacy, it is said that this became a source of concern to the local Democratic leaders in Memphis at that time and Mr. Crump. And I would like to specify that some of the local Democratic leaders at that time and Mr. Crump became

very concerned because they knew if Mr. Willkie was a successful candidate in the November election it would mean, of course, that my father would be a very powerful figure in the Republican Party again. Of course his influence had sort of diminished somewhat during the years that Mr. Roosevelt was elected president, because there was no federal patronage for the Republicans during a Democratic administration. This would, of course, be changed with Mr. Willkie's ascendancy to the presidency.

So it is said that because of this situation, that some of these Democratic leaders decided that the only way to handle the situation was to intimidate and threaten the colored leaders in Memphis, so that such campaign rallies and the promotion of Mr. Willkie's candidacy among the colored people would not continue.

Dr. Martin had scheduled a rally, I think in October, at a church here in Memphis, and this was according to the usual procedure. I think there had been already two or three, but this particular one was along about, I think, the middle of October when the campaign was intensifying, and it looked like Mr. Willkie was making greater inroads among the voters in Shelby County and Memphis. And the rally was highly advertised at the church and in the newspapers and with handbills, etc...He received a message brought to him by a colored Republican that the rally should be cancelled. Well, he was quite shocked at this, because this was a procedure that had never happened before to his knowledge in Memphis, as the colored people had been voting down here ever since the enactment of the...I think

it's the fifteenth amendment to the constitution that gave them the vote after the Civil War. And he being a man not easily frightened said well, no, he wasn't going to cancel the rally. Why should he? So then this emissary returned a day or so later and told him that if he didn't cancel this rally, his drugstore would be policed.

CRAWFORD Do you remember who the emissary was or who he came from?

R. CHURCH Well, Dr. Martin said the emissary was Lt. George W. Lee.

He said he was the man that gave him the message. Then, I think, the next step was that this emissary, Lt. Lee, took the message back to the administration of the city at that time, and he told them that Dr. Martin refused to cancel the rally and that he had told him that his drugstore would be policed, and he was still going to hold the rally. And I think that the emissary urged him to cancel the rally, but he said no.

CRAWFORD Who had sent the message to Dr. Martin to cancel the rally?

R. CHURCH It came through this emissary, and I'm not sure whether it was Attorney General Gerber, but it was somebody high up in the administration. I mentioned Mr. Gerber, because I recall that Dr. Martin said that he went to talk to him about it afterwards to see if there was something that could be done, and he said there was nothing that could be done. I do not know whether the idea to police his drugstore originated with Mr. Gerber or not, or whether he was told to do this by someone, but he was involved, let us put it that way.

Anyway, Dr. Martin went ahead and had the rally, and the next morning the drugstore was policed, and these policemen remained at the drugstore, I think, for several weeks. And of course the drugstore suffered heavy losses, even though the citizens defied the police and were searched when they went in there and rallied around him.

And then there was an incident of even the nearby kindergarten children, brought in there to be served ice cream cones, being searched, ostensibly for narcotics. That was why the search was supposedly initiated. This of course received great coverage in the daily newspapers, and most of the time the coverage was favorable to Dr. Martin, because they thought his civil rights were being violated. And of course we must remember this was long before any civil rights laws, or otherwise I don't think all of this would have happened in the first place.

But anyway, this resulted in Dr. Martin's leaving Memphis and going to Chicago. His drugstore continued in operation, and one of his sons took charge of it, but the goal was reached in having him leave the city.

And at the same time another active Republican in my father's organization named Elmer Atkinson, who operated a restaurant and a billiard hall on Beale Street, also received this same treatment. And his place was policed even to the extent of having his wife's Catholic priest searched as he entered the business, which of course received great coverage in the newspapers, and the police department was severely criticized because of these operations.

CRAWFORD Did Dr. Martin feel that Boss Crump was responsible for this?

R. CHURCH Yes. I might say that after Dr. Martin went to Chicago (he owned a baseball team), and at that time you must remember that there were segregated facilities for baseball. Jackie Robinson hadn't yet come on the scene. And they had replicas of-- I think they called it the Negro American League and the Negro National League, like the leagues they have in organized professional baseball. And Dr. Martin owned one of these baseball teams. He was also president of...I think it was the Negro American League. I'm not sure, but he was president of one of these national leagues. And so it happened that his team was playing in Memphis. Fact is, he owned the Memphis team. They were called the Memphis Red Sox. And he came down here from Chicago just for the day to see this team play at...Was there something called Russwood Park, or was there a baseball park here called that, where the Memphis Chicks used to play?

CRAWFORD It sounds familiar.

R. CHURCH Well, anyway, he went to this park with his wife. He came down to spend a day or so just to watch his team play and then planned to leave. And as he was sitting in the grandstand during... (I think the game was about half over)...policemen came into the grandstand and took him out, asked him to walk out with them, took him in the squad car, and told him to leave the city. And he and his wife left hurriedly that night.

And he, to this day, thought that Mr. Crump was behind this incident. He thought that some way or other Mr. Crump had learned of his presence in the city and, because of the publicity that had resulted from

his activites with Republicans down here, did not want him back in town, because he did not know what effect it would have, because the colored population, of course, was very sympathetic to Dr. Martin. And he thinks the police action that day was initiated by Mr. Crump or someone who thought that would be Mr. Crump's wishes, let's put it that way.

CRAWFORD Did the policemen give any reason for asking him to leave or telling him to leave the city?

R. CHURCH I don't remember that he specified anything like that.

It's been so long ago. I don't...if you're asking me whether they said it was Mr. Crump's orders that he leave town, I don't think it was that specific, but he was just told to leave the city, or else I think he would be either arrested or have serious trouble or something like that. But anyway, he left.

CRAWFORD When the police were intimidating his customers at the drugstore, what reason did they give, or did they have to give one?

R. CHURCH Well, they said they were searching the people for narcotics. They were...they claimed that Dr. Martin might be illegally selling narcotics, which was not true, or course, because he was a licensed pharmacist. I think he was a notary public and had a federal post office substation in his store, which, I might say, my father was instrumental in getting for him. For a long time that was the only substation post office in Tennessee operated by a colored firm or a colored man. So I don't see how one could have all

those things, having to be, I think, bonded and investigated before you are a notary public, and you have to be investigated before you have a federal substation post office, you know, in your business. Obviously, there was, I think, some great story concocted to justify the tactics of the police, and that was it.

CRAWFORD When did Dr. Martin leave town? Did he leave before the election?

R. CHURCH I think he left in November of 1940. I can't remember whether he left before the election or not. Usually the national election is in the first part of the month, around the...I think it's the first or second Thursday in November. And I don't know; I'm sure he was gone by the end of November, and I don't know whether or not he left before the election. I can't say.

CRAWFORD Do you remember if the police were withdrawn after the election or after he left?

R. CHURCH I don't remember exactly when they were withdrawn. I couldn't say, and I wouldn't want to be inaccurate.

CRAWFORD Where were the white members of the Republican Party when all this was happening?

R. CHURCH Well, there were a few that were active at this time. I think among them were Mr. C. Arthur Bruce, who had been the Republican nominee for governor in '36, I believe. And I must say that he was unsuccessful, and my father stated this fact and the reasons for it in his brief, presented to the national convention. Maybe he was a candidate for governor in '32. I'm not quite accurate, but it was in the thirties. But one of the reasons for his defeat was that he refused to come to any

colored meetings (colored political meetings) and I think my father, I'm quite sure, in fact, my father and some members of his organization swore out affidavits to that effect, because I think Mr. Bruce had the idea that he would lose support among some of the white voters if he went to these colored meetings. But of course, as you know, at that time there were not many white Republicans in Memphis.

But to get back to your questions as to where they were, I do not know. I have often speculated as to whether or not there might have been some intimidation of the white voters in Memphis by the Crump machine. I do not know whether or not the Crump machine at that time was trying to get into a situation where they had no political opposition at all. I notice that nowadays, in the past decade in the sixties, the Republican Party among white voters has simply mushroomed in Memphis. Where all these people were in that era, I have begun to wonder, because they are at an age group now, middle age, where they would have been grown and active enough at that time to be interested in politics. So the question then revolves about: Were they too intimidated by Mr. Crump? As I said before, he was ostensibly after the colored Republicans, but was his organization trying to have no opposition at all? Perhaps these white people who are now Republicans did not want to join the party at that time, because it was lead by Negroes. In any event, they did not come forward or speak out in behalf of my father or Dr. Martin, who were undergoing political persecution.

Now I'd like to make an aside here, if I may, please. There was a point of view expressed that Congressman Reece had some understanding with the Crump machine in Memphis and Tennessee, because as you remember

at that time in 1940 President Roosevelt was still president, and Mr. Crump had a chain of command unbroken from the Tennessee delegation in Congress all the way up to the White House, including the...I think it was the governor and the local Democratic machine. Anyway, he could be quite influential. And this rumor, or rather, point of view, was that Mr. Reece had some understanding with Mr. Crump, because at that time Mr. Reece was interested in becoming governor of Tennessee.

And this was supported by some newspaper articles which stated that Representative Hugh Scott, who is now Senator Scott and the minority leader of the Senate, had been rather critical of Congressman Reece and some other Southern Republican politicians, because he claimed that they were not partisan enough. And he thought that there should be more partisan activity among the Republican Party in the South and not so much understanding or alignment with the Democrats. So that factor might also have been in operation, indicating that there was some kind of an understanding between some of the white Republicans and the Democratic machine down here in Memphis to support each other.

CRAWFORD At any rate, it was impossible, or considered impossible, to win a statewide election without Boss Crump's support.

[R. CHURCH: That is true.] Your father did try, though, to secure some recourse for this intimidation of black voters?

R. CHURCH Oh yes, he did. He prevailed upon Dr. Martin to go to Washington with him and discuss this situation in Memphis with officials of the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, and the Department of Justice, because he was of the opinion that this was gross

exacerbation, you know, intimidation of civil rights. And they prepared a memorandum that recounted all of these activities, and it was substantiated by quotes from different people. They presented it to officials of the Republican and the Democratic Parties and the Department of Justice, but they were not able to do anything.

Now I do recall that my father told me that when they were talking to Senator Robert Taft, who at that time was, I guess you might say, the main leader of the Republican Party, Senator Taft told him that Mr. C. Arthur Bruce, who was prominent in the Republican Party down here (the white Republicans, you might say), had written to him and other Republican leaders. They requested that no action be taken on behalf of Dr. Martin and this infamous situation that existed in Memphis as far as the rights of colored voters were concerned, because it would destroy the party. And it is quite possible one might conjecture that while Mr. Bruce was writing for the Republicans, that perhaps Mr. Crump's organization, or Mr. Crump, was in touch with the Democrats and the Department of Justice officials, so nothing at all happened, although my father and Dr. Martin did make valiant efforts at their own expense to see that some kind of justice was enacted down here in regard to this particular situation.

CRAWFORD Do you remember if this incident received national publicity as well as publicity in the local papers?

R. CHURCH Yes, it received national publicity in the colored press, of course. Now I do not know how much national publicity it received in the daily white press, but I do recall that there was an article written about it in Time magazine that was not at all complimentary to Mr. Crump. And it seems as though I recall that



he made some comment to the press about Time magazine and the type of reporting they did. I'm not sure about that, but I think I have seen that in some of the papers that we have on this particular subject.

CRAWFORD How successful was this intimidation of Negro voters in the fall of 1940?

R. CHURCH Well, of course you know Mr. Willkie lost. I don't know what the proportion was down here in Memphis. But I do know that in the beginning when Dr. Martin started out with these rallies there were many people coming to his rallies, and there weren't many people going to the rallies of the Democratic Party. I guess you might say Dr. Walker, Dr. J. E. Walker of the Universal Life, was the leading Democrat at the time, and there were not many people coming out to the Democratic meetings.

And I heard my father say that this was, of course, of some concern to Mr. Crump, as I have said before, because he knew if Republicans got in, my father would be the chief patronage dispenser and leader down here among all the Republicans.

And I also heard him say that someone told him about a colored minister, I don't know who it was, I can't be exact about the man's name, although I remember he did call his name. But I don't want to accuse anybody falsely, so we'll just say a colored minister who was quite prominent here who was trying to curry the favor of Mr. Crump, told Mr. Crump that the only way that he would be able to make great headway among the colored voters here in Memphis would be to get support

from people who were obligated to him in the school system. And if you remember, around that time the Depression was not quite over, and war hadn't started, and jobs were hard to come by. And at that time also, political influence was quite important in getting a job in the Memphis school system, and I assume many people were obligated to Mr. Crump or some of his allies.

So they commenced to prevail upon the principals of the schools, and of course there weren't as many high schools and grammar schools in Memphis in 1940 as there are today, and these people were quite prominent in the community. So they commenced to prevail upon them to come out in support of Mr. Crump and the Democrats. Also, there were some prominent ministers here who had wives who were in the school system. As I mentioned to you, these people had children who were in college, and jobs were not easy to come by then, and ministers were not making, I don't think, as much money as they are now. So of course the wife's income in the school system was very important. Therefore, it was not too difficult for them to put the pressure on these people to come out and praise Mr. Crump and be advocates of the local Democratic point of view. This was quite a source of frustration to them, because inside themselves they must have almost been paranoid, because of this particular type of situation in which they found themselves. And they were quite criticized nationally in the colored press for having any part of alignment with Mr. Crump. But I understand they were forced to write letters to the newspapers here in Memphis and praise him and do other things that were done under pressure. I think that was just a situation in

which they found themselves helpless on account of the economics involved.

CRAWFORD Was this sort of thing unusual on the part of Boss Crump? Had he done things like this before?

R. CHURCH I think so. I think that this can be recounted best and I think the most recent account of anyone of substance reviewing his activities in that particular period is an article that Senator Kefauver wrote when he got elected in 1948. He refers to Mr. Crump being elected the first time in Memphis, as he put it (and I'm quoting Senator Kefauver), "in a strong arm race for mayor;" and the article described how in more recent years he would raise taxes--have the assessor raise the taxes of people who disagreed with him, or harass them in their businesses in different ways.

Now although he doesn't call any names, Senator Kefauver mentions this mortician in Memphis. That they used to have a Memphis policeman always give his ambulance driver a ticket for speeding. And the man turned it around to make it a humorous thing by taking a full page ad in the local paper saying he was the only Memphis ambulance service that had a traffic cop as an escort. After the advertisement was published, the policeman was immediately removed. Now I remember that myself, and that was Thompson Brothers that had a funeral home here that some way or other incurred the displeasure of Mr. Crump.

CRAWFORD Was that in the thirties?

R. CHURCH I think so, but I remember particularly that they used to always be giving Thompson Brothers ambulances tickets for speeding. That was when, I think, we had competitive ambulance service, and several people were trying to get to the person that was injured.

CRAWFORD Then this sort of thing had been done before?

R. CHURCH I think over a period of time if you didn't sort of play ball, then something would happen to you in various ways.

CRAWFORD Well, had Boss Crump encouraged colored voters or permitted them to vote before?

R. CHURCH I think so, as long as they voted the way that he wanted them to vote. Now at the time when all this was going on, I wasn't paying too much attention to politics, because I was young, you know, much younger than I am now. But I think that he used to use the uneducated colored person to vote at election time, because I can remember my father saying that Memphis always carried the state. And the election returns from Memphis were always the last to come in, and whatever was needed to make a majority for the candidates that the Crump organization was backing was always able to be obtained in Memphis. Now they claimed that they used to vote people who were working on the nearby plantations by the carload. I don't know whether this is true or not, but it was alleged, let me say it that way. And there were quite

a few people that were brought to the polls in this way and given instructions as to how to vote. Now I was much younger at the time, but this was rumored around, and it was, I think, nationally known that Memphis sort of carried the state of Tennessee.

CRAWFORD Well, Shelby County had almost twenty percent of the vote in the entire state, and in a state where the elections were often contested closely, Shelby County easily did make the difference.

R. CHURCH I think you're right.





THIS IS THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE.
THIS PROJECT IS "THE ROBERT CHURCH FAMILY OF MEMPHIS." THIS IS
INTERVIEW NUMBER TWO ON JULY 10, 1973 WITH MISS ANNETH CHURCH AND
MISS ROBERTA CHURCH IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY
DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MRS. SHARON HESSE.

CRAWFORD Ms. Church, in the election of 1940, of course, the events did involve the entire Republican Party in the county, but I'd like to deal with the effects of this election on the Church family itself, specifically, on Robert Church, Jr. and his ability to live in Memphis. Also, we should deal with what happened to his property.

R. CHURCH Well, as I have said previously, my father during the 1940 election was spending quite a bit of time in the East and the North organizing the colored vote, because, as you know, the Democrats had made great inroads on the colored vote, and they were trying to see if they could not have some of them return to the Republican Party. So he left town in February, I believe.

Now, according to my aunt, the enmity of Mr. Crump was incurred by the Church family in my grandfather's time when my grandfather supported his opponent (who I believe she said was J.J. Williams) for mayor, when Mr. Crump first made his attempt to run for public office. And I don't think this sat very well with him. And I don't recall all other incidents that happened, but you must



remember that during my grandfather's time Mr. Crump had not achieved the great influence that he had during my father's time. So whatever things he tried to do to my grandfather were not very effective.

Now, however, in my father's time we must remember that the Republicans had an unbroken, I guess you might say, tenure in the White House ever since the end of Woodrow Wilson's term, I believe, up through President Hoover. And so, during that time, my father had risen into prominence locally and nationally in the Republican Party and Mr. Crump had risen to prominence locally and in the state in the Democratic Party. Well, subsequent to 1932, of course, President Roosevelt was elected, and that gave Mr. Crump influence all the way up, let us say, to the White House.

Well, during the time of the early thirties, I can remember this myself, was when Mr. Crump commenced to try to actively harass my father in a more overt fashion through the city offices, and that took the form of constantly finding different types of flaws in the real estate that my father owned, some of which was residential; he owned quite a few houses. But they moved in mostly on the property that he owned that was occupied by businesses. Now what do I mean by harassment? Well, I mean it took the form of things like this: if you put in a fire escape after the fire inspectors had been to your property, then they'd find some trouble with the electrical wiring; after you got the electrical wiring repaired, there'd be some trouble with the exits; when you had the exits repaired like they wanted them, they'd find some trouble with the roof; if the roof was at fault and you got that repaired, then they'd find some trouble with the sprinkler system--all these types of things.

It was one constant thing after another, so that you always had to be spending money for repairs. The city wouldn't approve inspection unless you did this, that, or the other.

Also during this period of time there was a continuing increase in the assessment of my father's property far above what it was actually worth. And you must also remember that this was during the Depression when many people were land poor, and some of these people that my father was renting some residential property to couldn't even pay the rent. Now I guess to his credit, my father was not one of these harassing landlords, and sometimes people would go for months without paying rent, because they had children, and he was sympathetic with them trying to feed their children. However, his taxes went on and were being elevated.

Well, you came to a situation where I remember one night he came home and was quite annoyed, and he never discussed his business much around me, because he mostly discussed it with my grandmother, who was quite versed in this, because of course, she being my grandfather's wife, had been instrumental in helping him, my grandfather, with some of his, I think, payments and bookkeeping, etc. Not a great deal but, due to the fact that she was his wife and subsequently his widow, she had been involved in some of his real estate business. So I remember his telling her that he had this terrible session with some assessors in the tax office about the value of certain property. And he was telling them, "Well, if you tax it that high, I'd be willing to sell it to you for that value." And this was supposed, as I reflect now in later years, to be an example of the exorbitant taxes that they were assessing his

property for, when it would have been impossible for him to get a buyer to buy it at the price that they were saying it was worth, as far as the taxes were concerned. So I think that's sort of a general illustration about what was happening in that respect.

Now I would like to mention some other aspects of it, but maybe you better give me some direction.

CRAWFORD Do you remember when this harassment started? They were were giving him trouble with inspections and assessments in the late thirties?

R. CHURCH I would say so. I would say it started around when Mr. Roosevelt came in, and therefore the Republicans were out. And I think Mr. Crump had in the back of his mind he didn't want any colored person to ever occupy again in Memphis the position of influence that my father had, and I think he had this, perhaps, in his mind that he was going to try to move in on him starting then.

Now I would like to say this, that my father had a very fine lawyer, a very prominent and influential lawyer here by the name of Charles Bryan, and he, I think, knew my grandfather also. And I think that when my father was having difficulties with the city administration of Mr. Crump about his property that Mr. Bryan was interceding for him, trying to get some kind of fair appraisal of his property, and I think--now, this is a matter of conjecture--but I think that they had some kind of an oral agreement with the tax office and the city about how this was going to be handled. But in the meantime, I think prior to 1940 or just before that time, Mr. Bryan died, so I don't think this oral agreement was honored, and that accounted for them moving in directly on us in 1940.

CRAWFORD Do you feel that Mr. Bryan was able in some way to protect things?

R. CHURCH I think he was able to hold them to an honorable agreement that they had worked out that was satisfactory to my father insofar as he was able.

CRAWFORD What did your father try to do?

R. CHURCH Well, you might say they put us in exile, so to speak. This occurred right after Dr. Martin started holding those rallies and they moved in and seized all of our property, allegedly for local taxes. Now I'd like to make that clear. My father had no difficulty with the federal taxes or Internal Revenue Service. It was strictly with the Memphis situation down here and the Memphis taxes. And when he was out of town in the East with his political activity, that's when they moved in and seized all his property, including our family home and his office and other properties that he owned throughout the city. And this, of course, put him in a very untenable position. And as things developed, it seemed the best thing for my aunt to leave Memphis and let them have it, until he could get himself together to work out what would be the best course for him to take.

And as it happened, he wasn't able to do anything at all, because he never was able to work out anything with them. For example, after they took his office as part of the parcel of--I don't know how many pieces, there must have been around twenty,

including the office and the family home and some valuable property he had at Second and Gayoso and a couple of farms--one that is now Fuller Park and one out on the Raleigh Road...And he wanted to buy the office building on Beale Street back, you know, because his papers were there and everything, and it was a very nice piece of property. That was one he started to negotiate on. But they would not permit him to buy anything back but the family home--not Second and Gayoso or any of these other properties. The only thing he was permitted to buy back was the family home.

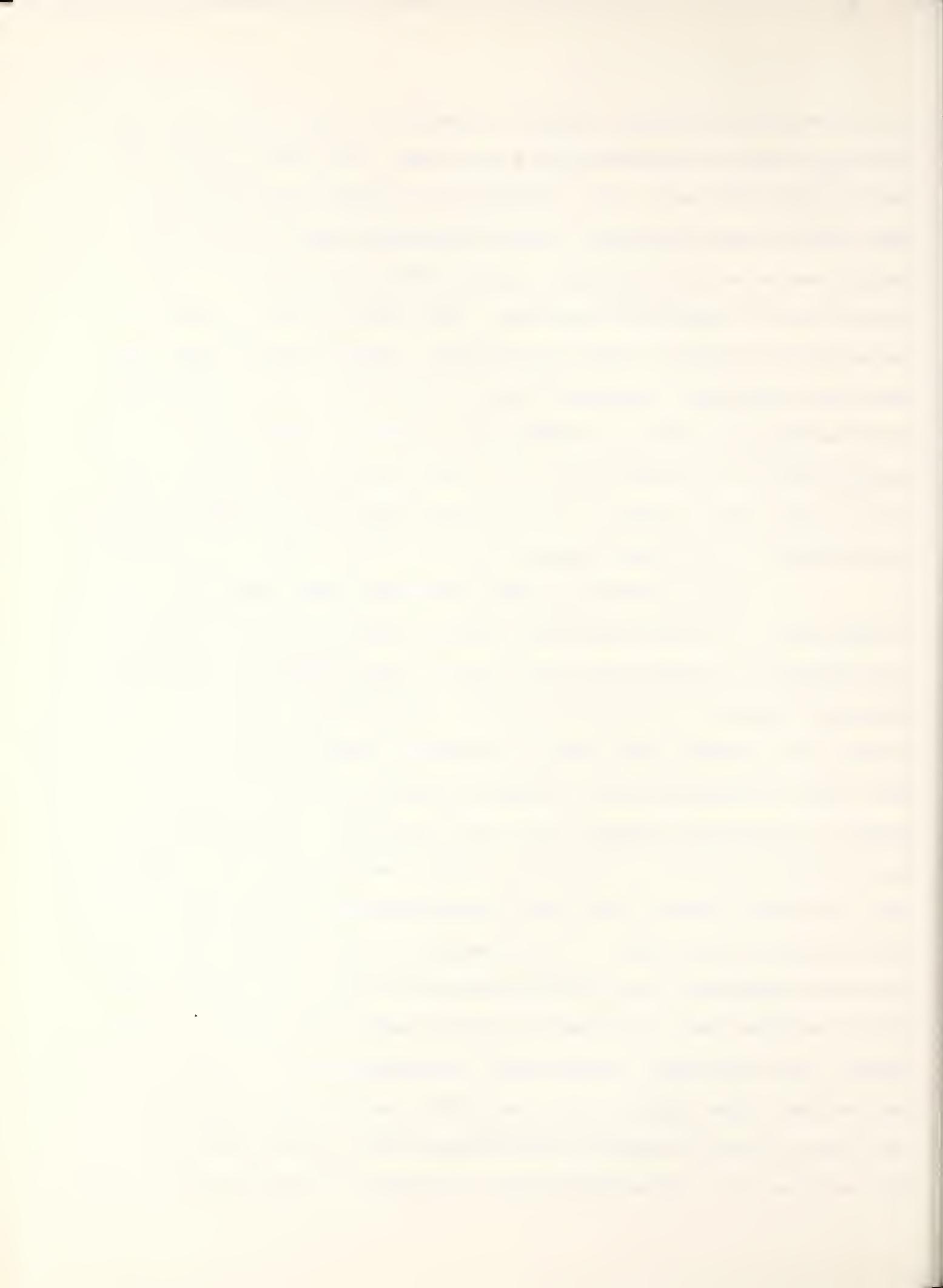
CRAWFORD Do you remember what reason they gave for that?

R. CHURCH I don't remember that they gave any, because I remember my aunt saying that she tried to get an appointment to see Mr. Gerber, but he wouldn't see her. I don't know why, but she'll tell you about that. And I don't recall that they gave any reason at all as to why you couldn't buy back anything, you know, excepting that one piece of property.

Now I will also say that we owned a farm down here at what is now T. O. Fuller State Park. I think my aunt said that was the first property my father ever owned. My grandfather gave it to him on his twenty-first birthday. I don't know how many acres it was, I imagine around a hundred or something like that. And this was a very beautiful piece of land. I've been down there many times. It was rolling countryside, and it ended up in a bluff overlooking the river, part of it. And my father used to go down there and hunt quail a lot. He liked to hunt quail, and a couple of times I went with him,

but it was too strenuous; I didn't enjoy it. I must have been about fourteen, but he enjoyed walking up and down. All these hills were really quite difficult. So, adjoining our property down there in what was the Ensley Bottoms, was some property owned by the Barrett family, who were very prominent cotton brokers in Memphis. I think one of them was named Frost Barrett. They used to have a mansion on the southwest corner of Vance and Orleans. Vance Street at one time was quite a palatial residential area. Even when I as a child grew up on Lauderdale Street, I remember the Goldsmith family had a handsome home on Vance, and the C. M. Clarke family, who owned a book store, also lived on Vance. The Grosvenor family (he was Napoleon Hill's son-in-law)--all of these houses were there in my time, I can remember.

And this Barrett property was much lower than ours. As I told you, this rolling hillside was on a bluff, but the flatland was frequently covered with river water in the springtime, partially submerged because of the river floods. But when the county or the city bought this property, Mr. Barrett received a sizable amount of money, much more than my father did, even though his land was not as valuable and was subject to periodic flooding when the river rose. And although our land was on higher ground, we received a lesser amount per acre. Added to that, my father didn't even know this property was being sold. And the first thing we knew about it was somebody, I can't remember who it was, up at the courthouse saw something about the fact that this had been sold. And they took the taxes out of it, what they said was a fair amount, and there was a residue left. And my point in telling you this was the fact that this was to us an unfair sale of the property, because this other person's property was submerged part of the year by the water, yet ours was not, yet we did not get the same price that he did, though



it was worth more.

Now I can tell you this, that after my father died-- he knew this money was there, but he didn't bother to get it. I don't know what his plans were; I think he planned to get it sometime. When my aunt and I came here to Memphis for his funeral, we received a telephone call from a very prominent, influential white lawyer who identified himself to me (of course I knew him by name), and he said that my father had done him a favor some years ago and that he'd like to be of service to us. And I think that maybe my father had mentioned the property to him when he was down here. You know he died in Memphis. He'd been here a couple of weeks before he died, and I think he had a conversation with this man. I'm correct in that. Now I remember that this man had told me he'd been talking to my father about this property, and he'd like to continue working on the legal aspects, because I was my father's heir. So of course we said, "By all means." And he then was trying to get this money for us, and it proved to be a most difficult task, much more difficult than he had anticipated. And from what he said, he was treated with the utmost hostility and even, I guess one might say, contempt, when he was up there at the court house trying to get this money for us. He was very surprised at their attitudes and he said it was a most unpleasant experience. But he finally was successful in getting this money for us. And I cite that instance just to show you the hostile climate that existed in Memphis at that time.

CRAWFORD That was in the early fifties.

R. CHURCH That was in 1952 right after my father died.

CRAWFORD How much property did he recover for you? It was not the full amount, was it?

R. CHURCH You mean what this lawyer was getting for us?

[CRAWFORD: Yes.] No, this was just a residue of the sale of the property after the taxes had been taken out for this one particular farm down there where Fuller Park is now located. But he was interested in trying to secure some of his other property. I have a letter where he told my father that he thought a lot of those sales that occurred in 1940 could be set aside because of irregularities, and he would like to look into it for him. Well, I don't know what my father planned with him, because unfortunately this gentleman died shortly after he had assisted us. And of course, whereas I had been interested in trying to have that course pursued...point one, it's a very expensive thing to take on, and this attorney was doing it because I think he thought my father had been mistreated and my father had befriended him sometime previously; and secondly, I don't know where in the world you would have gotten a lawyer in 1952 that would have taken on the city administration. So there we were, forced to just sit and see all this go down the drain, so to speak, because we couldn't do anything at all.

Now there was this property we owned at Second and Gayoso behind the Peabody Hotel, which is now a parking garage. There was a colored man that worked around there that knew us quite well, and he wrote us a letter after my father died and told us that he had overheard the conversation of some lawyers down there --I think they were talking to the owner of this parking lot, the man that owned it. Apparently there was some discussion about us and something about the statute of

limitations on this property that was questionable. He thought we should know about this, because in his opinion there was something going on there that was somewhat irregular and maybe we could have proceeded to see if we couldn't get it adjusted and gotten some settlement out of it. But when we wrote him and asked him to be more specific, we never heard from him again, and we think he was afraid to be specific because of some connections he may have had down there that might have resulted in his losing his job or something like that. So there wasn't anything we could do about that.

CRAWFORD Do you remember when this happened?

R. CHURCH Well, this was subsequent to 1952. It must have been 1953 or '54, something like that.

CRAWFORD Do you know approximately how much property your father had seized by the city?

R. CHURCH We have a list of it. I think that somebody sent us a clipping from the newspapers, and I think that it was quite a few parcels of property. I think it must have been almost twenty. I'm not sure about that, but I have it filed away somewhere.

CRAWFORD Some of them business and some of them residential, I believe.

R. CHURCH That's right. That's right.

CRAWFORD Were they scattered in different places? [R. CHURCH: Yes.] Why was the city able to allege the taxes had not been paid.

R. CHURCH Well, I think that it might have been the fact that the taxes that they had set upon this property were of such magnitude that it may have been in that time, with the Depression on, impossible for my father to have met the assessment, you see, because you must remember that property was frequently vacant. Although the property was vacant, all of these repairs were required by the city all of the time that I have outlined before. And added to that, as I said before, my father was a kindhearted person and did not press some of his tenants for rent, which I guess is poor business. But there were frequently cases I can remember.

A man on St. Paul Street by the name of Hunter lived in a house in an area which is now a part of the Foote Homes. At that time it was a very nice residential section. And I remember that man didn't pay my father any rent for eight years, but he had, I think, eight or nine children, and there was great difficulty for him to even feed them. So my father and he had some kind of an oral agreement that when he was able he would pay him something.

And I know there was another person down here on Beale Street named Miss White that operated a business called The Artificial Flower Shop...[A. CHURCH: Flower Shop.] Yes. Down there on Beale Street across from his office. He owned a building down there. She was on the first floor, and she was not doing much business, and she would tell him all these sad tales so he wouldn't collect from her regularly, you see. So, or course, I guess that all those things entered into it when you have a high assessment and people can't

pay rent. He may have been frankly somewhat behind, but I think that he always planned to pay. And I don't think he would probably have been behind if the assessments hadn't been so high on his property.

CRAWFORD What about his papers and personal records or business records that were in the office. What happened to them?

R. CHURCH Well, we had to make some immediate plans, so we put them in storage. And we found a very, very fine man down here that operated a storage company that gave us this space that we had to pay for, of course, but he kept it for us and it enabled us to sort the papers when my aunt and I, after my father died, came down here in the summertime. We could sort them in this particular place, and that's the way we got to salvage some of these papers. A great portion of it, I'm sorry to say, we had to dispose of, because there was no place for us to store it.

Now I would like to tell you this, that the city would not permit my father to buy his office back, and they said he could pay rent. So he paid rent to the city for this office down on Beale Street for quite a number of months. Now, Auntie, am I not correct in this? You were sending that rent to Lt. Lee to pay to the city for you, is that right? [A. CHURCH: I think so.] You sent him the check every month to turn in to the city and pay this rent for us, because we had great confidence in him. And it wasn't long before that, I think, you got a letter or a notice or he told you something, the city wasn't accepting any more rent for the office, and you didn't know why. And the next thing we knew was that Lt. Lee had been negotiating with the city to buy the building without telling us about it, and he bought it subsequently for the Atlanta Life Insurance

Company office.

CRAWFORD What happened to your family home?

R. CHURCH That was sold, and for a while the people who bought it lived in it, and then it was all taken in with this housing project by the city. [A. CHURCH: It was burned.] Burned. Let me say it this way, ostensibly for the testing of fire equipment. They supposedly had a convention here to demonstrate the latest in fire-fighting equipment. And it's very interesting as to why they would pick that house out of all the houses in Memphis, you see, and many people thought it had a certain significance psychologically.

A. CHURCH Well, didn't the paper come out and say it was an act of infamy?

R. CHURCH Yes. I think the colored citizens were very perceptive on that. And the Tri-State Defender, which was the leading colored paper in the city at that time, had an editor by the name of Louis Swingler who had been very resentful of the treatment that my father was getting by the local Democratic machine and also resentful of the way colored people were being treated in general--Dr. Martin, for example. They had in addition to that--I think you may remember Mr. Randolph and the harassment he had, and the harassment of some of the prominent colored citizens in Memphis when the city officials were trying to prevent Mr. Randolph from coming here to make his speech, and also the Freedom Train. All of that had built up great animosity toward the city administration among colored people. So when this house of ours was burned, they had an editorial about it in the Tri-State Defender, and they called it an "act of infamy." They were perceptive enough to see that this

was some kind of a psychological tool, to show the citizens of Memphis the ultimate in what they could do to somebody.

CRAWFORD Do you remember what year the house was burned?

R. CHURCH I think that was in the fifties.

CRAWFORD Would it have been before or after Mr. Crump's death?

R. CHURCH I think it was before.

CRAWFORD The colored paper felt then that it was retaliation against the Church family. [A. CHURCH: Yes.] [R. CHURCH: Yes.]

A. CHURCH Because it had this article that said it was an act of infamy.

R. CHURCH And I try to be objective. I don't know how much Mr. Crump had to do with that, whether it was some of his allies or somebody like that, but it was during his lifetime, because I don't think he died until '54 or '55, did he?

CRAWFORD I believe October '54.

R. CHURCH '54. Well, I think this happened before he died. I'm not sure about that.

CRAWFORD Have you tried to repurchase the house?

R. CHURCH No. No, my father would rather have repurchased either the property at Second at Gayoso or Beale Street, because he thought it was more valuable. I think at that time there had been an announcement that they were going to use all of the area in which our

home was located for a housing project, and he saw no point in trying to repurchase it.

CRAWFORD Why did the city refuse to allow him to repurchase the business property?

R. CHURCH I really don't know. I think it was because they thought it was valuable, and they thought that if he started to buy back the more valuable pieces of property, he would be enabled to re-establish himself here.

CRAWFORD Why did he decide to leave after the seizures in 1940?

A. CHURCH He didn't have anything.

R. CHURCH You must remember they completely stripped him financially of his real estate which, of course, was his income, and that left him in a state of financial disaster. Added to that, they stripped him of his political base here, you might say, and also had moved in onto some of the members of his organization.

And my father was a person that never discussed difficult things like that, and I think that sort of led to his death. I think he internalized a lot of his feelings, and I think he was particularly concerned because of me, because my grandfather's will had stipulated that the property would go from generation to generation and never be sold. And whereas he had benefitted from my grandfather's accumulation, here I was left with nothing, you see, and I had to go to work. And this, I think, was a quite devastating experience for him, not only personally, but on account of the fact of what he was doing to me, and I was being denied some of the things that I might have had.

But I might say that he was a very strong person with a very forceful personality and a very disciplined man, and I never recall him complaining during all the years up until his death, when he must have suffered greatly. There were many things that he never even mentioned. And of course it meant quite a curtailment of his living habits, as you can imagine. And he never complained about anything at all. I'm sure that he internalized, and this must have been a source of great distress to him mentally. But he always presented a calm outward appearance, and he threw himself into other activities eventually that kept him before the public.

And, as I have mentioned to my aunt, as I reflect on it now, it is quite a tribute to him that during all of these years that he was stripped of his political influence, Republicans weren't in power anyway, and he had this personal tragedy as far as his finances were concerned, he still attracted people to him, particularly young people, labor leaders, lawyers, and political leaders and so forth that were interested in his point of view and his philosophy as far as politics were concerned, although he had no political influence to offer, because the Republicans weren't in power, as you know.

And I would like to say that I was told by a lawyer that I might have some redress in the courts, because this situation in Memphis was through animosity toward my father, and I was not a part of that. I was the unwitting victim of all these circumstances. And I possibly could make a case that I was deprived, since this inheritance was not from him, but from my grandfather. But, as I have said before, where will you find a lawyer that will take on the city administration, you see? You have to have sort of charitable leanings and intent to look for justice to take on something like this.

And I might say this also, that although this has, perhaps, deprived me of a lot of things that were rightfully mine that I would have had, I would not have my father have taken any other course, because, as I say, although it has meant great deprivation for me, I think that unless you have your honor and integrity intact and can call your soul your own, there's no point in living. And I would not have him beholden to Mr. Crump to benefit me or anything like that, because to me money doesn't mean that much. There are other things, the intangibles...the honor and the integrity and the type of values that you have in life that go down in history and mean far more to you as far as your character is concerned rather than money. Money is transient. Honor, I think, is more permanent.

CRAWFORD I believe you sound like your father's daughter.

R. CHURCH Well, I don't know about that, but that's the way I would have had him do. I wouldn't had had him do anything other than the course he took.

CRAWFORD Did he live in Washington after leaving Memphis?

R. CHURCH Well, part of the time.

It was during the period after he left Memphis that World War II started, and as you know, he was very friendly with a gentleman by the name of A. Philip Randolph. He had been for years and years and years an ally of Mr. Randolph when Mr. Randolph was trying to organize pullman porters into a union, which was in an era when organization of labor unions among white people was quite

distasteful among some segments of the public, and of course with colored people that was practically anarchy. But he had sided with Mr. Randolph and aided whenever he could, because he believed in the employment concept of equal employment and fair wages.

So Mr. Randolph was the leader of this equal employment opportunity concept, and he prevailed upon President Roosevelt to issue that executive order, I think it was 8802, which is a milestone as far as colored people are concerned. That was the first thing that gave them equal employment opportunity in the war plants. So when this executive order was issued, Mr. Randolph and my father and some others saw the necessity of having it continued after the war was over. So Mr. Randolph and my father and some others saw the necessity of having it continued after the war was over. So Mr. Randolph established an organization called the Permanent Fair Employment Commission, and I think he did that with a gentleman by the name of Rev. Allen Knight Chalmers, who was a prominent minister in the East who was interested in fair practices for all people. And Mr. Randolph prevailed upon my father to become a member of the board of directors of this organization and use his influence among the Republicans to vote for the continuation of this fair employment concept. At that time it was called the Establishment of Fair Employment Practices Commission or Fair Employment Practices Law; now it's called Equal Employment Opportunity.

R. CHURCH So my father had proven so successful and astute in his political sagacity with Republicans, and I think it was quite a tribute to him that Mr. Randolph prevailed upon him to talk to

all the senators, Republican and Democratic, on behalf of this committee, and lobby with them to see what success he could have in getting them to vote for this bill when it was introduced from time to time, because it was a broad economic concept, and it took a long time for it to be passed. But I think that it shows the trust that Mr. Randolph had in my father and the respect he had for him and the integrity he knew he had to ask him to talk to the Democratic senators as well, my father being Republican, and present the organization's point of view.

And at that time there was a man in Washington by the name of Clarence Mitchell who was the official lobbyist for the NAACP. Of course, this was in the forties. Mr. Mitchell was much younger then, but in recent years he has become more prominent. The Washington Post interviewed him about five or six years ago, and he said in the article that he learned his first lobbying from R.R. Church of Memphis, who taught him how to lobby and how to go to the senator's office and present his point of view.

And I remember that my father thought a lot of him, and when my father died he wrote me in longhand a very beautiful letter about how much esteem he held for my father and what a fine person he was and what an inspiration he had been to him.

So that was one thing that kept my father interested, and then he became interested, as usual, in the Republican Party's attitude toward the colored voter. He thought that they were being eliminated. I think that he thought that ever since Mr. Will Hayes had left the scene and Senator Butler and other people active in that era, there had been continuing diminution of influence of colored Republicans in the national

Party. And of course, since he had had this devastating experience in Memphis, he was then all the more certain that there should be some voice in the Party as far as colored Republicans were concerned. He founded an organization called the Republican American Committee, which was national in scope and existed up until he died. I don't think it lasted much longer after that, because he was the main advocate. But all these Republicans in the other states were supporting him to express their views to the national Republican leadership, as to what role they thought the Republican Party should play with the colored voter and how they should bring them back into the party, etc. So I think those were the two main interests he had after he left Memphis.

And of course he never gave up the idea that he would return here. And I think he thought that if Mr. Eisenhower got elected, he'd be in a pretty strong position to see that he would get some justice about this Memphis situation. You must remember now that Mr. Reece was on one side and my father was on the other. Reece was for Taft. He was Taft's southern campaign manager, and my father was for Eisenhower. And a very prominent white Republican down here in Memphis told me that when my father was here just before he died, he said that all he wanted to do was get Mr. Eisenhower in office, because then he'd have Mr. Reece where he wanted him. I think my father looked with disfavor upon Mr. Reece and his alleged alliance with Mr. Crump. Although there was maybe only an understanding that Mr. Reece and Mr. Crump had, he was in total disagreement with that.

And if you remember, I don't know whether I mentioned it

to you, Mr. Reece was under a great obligation to my father, because my father has supported him when he first ran for Congress after he got out of the army in World War I. He sought my father's influence to help him become national committeeman when Congressman J. Will Taylor died. In fact, I have a telegram that he sent my father and told him that he could get to be national committeeman without any trouble or opposition if my father would agree to support him, which my father did. And my father conceived the idea, presented it to him to be chairman of the Republican National Committee, and rallied support for him. [A. CHURCH: And he was re-elected.] Well, that was for the national committeeman. [A. CHURCH: That's the right one.] I'm talking about chairman of the national committee. [A. CHURCH: Oh, yes.] I remember my father said that he mentioned it to Mr. Reece in conversation that he ought to try for the chairmanship, and Mr. Reece threw up his hands and said, "Get that idea out of your head, because I'll never have a chance." And my father said, "Well, I don't know why you wouldn't have as good a chance as anybody else." And he left, he told me, Mr. Reece's office and went across the street to the office of Representative Joseph Martin of Massachusetts, who I believe was Minority Leader in the House of Representatives at that time for the Republican Party and quite influential. I think it was Representative Martin in the House of Representatives and Senator Taft in the Senate that were leaders of the party at that time. And he presented the idea to Representative Martin, and I think in a way my father was "clearing" so that Mr. Reece was not in opposition to any choice Representative

Martin would have. Representative Martin told him to go ahead. So then my father commenced to write letters around to the national committeemen--he had known quite a few of them over a period of years--and garnered support for Representative Reese. He subsequently became chairman of the national committee.

And I think my father thought that Mr. Reece was (now, this is conjecture)under obligation to him over the years, and I don't think that he thought that Mr. Reece exerted himself enough in this Memphis situation to assist in having some justice down here as far as politics went. I think he thought that it was because of Mr. Reece's understanding with Mr. Crump on some other things in the past, or the future, that Mr. Reece didn't want to move in with both feet.

CRAWFORD I believe we have this on another record. What about the incident here involving A. Philip Randolph? Could we go over that as to what happened and when?

R. CHURCH Well, yes. But I would like to mention two things before I get to that while we're on the subject of Mr. Crump. I think I should tell you that my father liked to attend the races. He didn't ever bet on them very often, but he loved horses and he liked to watch these thoroughbreds run. And after he left Memphis he ran head-on into Mr. Crump at the Kentucky Derby. It must have been in the late forties.

And it was at Churchill Downs, I think they were in the clubhouse, and my father met him head-on. Mr. Crump was either going to place a bet or he had collected. Anyway, I remember my father saying he had a handful of bills, and he said that when Mr. Crump

looked up and saw him approaching him, that he saw his hands began to tremble, holding this money. [A. CHURCH: I remember.] Do you remember him telling us that? [A. CHURCH: Yes, I remember.]

R. CHURCH And he said that he went up to Mr. Crump and told him that he certainly didn't appreciate the city of Memphis changing the name of Church's Park to the Beale Avenue Park, because Church's Park was named, not for him, but for my grandfather. And he told me that he told Mr. Crump that. He said, "My father was a wonderful man, and he did a great deal for Memphis. And I certainly don't think it was proper and I don't appreciate the city changing the name of that park in view of the fact of his contributions to the city." And he said Mr. Crump said he wasn't aware of this and he would look into it, but nothing ever happened. And then in 1951, when we came down here with my father, he sought an appointment to see Mr. Crump, but Mr. Crump wouldn't see him. And I thought that was interesting, while we were on this Crump business.

Now my aunt, maybe later on, would have something to tell you about that 1940 situation with regard to her recollections of it, when you want to get to her.

Now you were going to ask me something about Mr. Randolph, I believe.

CRAWFORD Yes. Did you have something else before that time?

R. CHURCH No, only my aunt's recollection of that 1940 situation.

I didn't know whether you wanted to go into that before you went into Mr. Randolph or not.

CRAWFORD We might let her rest a little more until the end of this, and then we'll get to that. [R. CHURCH: All right.]

[A. CHURCH: All right.]

R. CHURCH Well, did you want to ask me something about Mr. Randolph?

CRAWFORD Yes. What about A. Philip Randolph's appearance in Memphis and Mr. Crump's reaction to it? Do you remember when that happened and what the events were?

R. CHURCH I'm trying to remember just what year that was that Mr. Randolph spoke in Memphis. It was in, I think, 1943 that he was scheduled to speak in Memphis and address, I guess, his constituents. At that time he was the International President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which was affiliated with the AFL. At that time the AFL-CIO had not merged. And they had branches in many cities, and the Memphis branch wanted to have Mr. Randolph come here for a speaking engagement, because if you remember again, he'd just been successful in having that executive order issued by President Roosevelt to promote fair employment in the war plants, and this was quite a milestone in the economic history of the race. So they wanted to have him as a featured speaker here, and he was scheduled to speak here. I think it was November, 1943 at a church.

Now I was not here at the time, but through the colored press and our friends, we have learned that the meeting was ordered cancelled. That some sort of a word came down to Mr. Patton, whom I happen to know, who at that time was president of the Memphis branch

of the Brotherhood, and they were ordered not to have this meeting, and the meeting was cancelled.

Well, I think there was another convention going on in Memphis at the same time. And Mr. Randolph came here not knowing the meeting was cancelled, and while he was in the city--I can't remember, it was some kind of a convention of people who were farmers or who were sharecroppers or something--they asked him to speak at that meeting. So he did. And when he spoke at that convention, he said he thought that it was terrible to have the constitution violated and have free speech denied in the city of Memphis; it violated his constitutional rights. And he offered to come back and speak, and he thought the local civic organizations should band together and invite him, and if they did, he'd be glad to speak.

Well, due to the fact that the Crump administration, or regime, had intimidated the local leaders here, I think they were afraid to sponsor him. But you must remember that Mr. Crump had no influence with the labor unions, you see. He might have had some influence locally with some, but not nationally. And the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were in no way involved economically with the city administration. Their money came from the railroad companies and not the school system or the local business firms or anything like that, so there was not much retaliation he could do to them or to the AFL.

So, Mr. Randolph was invited to speak in Memphis again, but not by any local organization. It was the AFL and the Brotherhood

of Sleeping Car Porters branch here in Memphis. And he spoke at what is now the First Baptist Church of Beale Street, but I think it was then called Beale Street Baptist Church. And his audience was composed primarily of members of the Brotherhood and other labor unions in Memphis. And there was great opposition to him coming here by the city administration, Mr. Crump, and some white labor leaders. But of course the white labor leaders were powerless, because they were affiliated with the AFL, and the president of AFL, who at that time was William Greene, was a friend of Mr. Randolph's and was wholeheartedly supporting him to uphold the right of free speech. So he came here and nobody could do anything about it.

And I think there were some policemen in the audience to hear what he said, but I think Mr. Randolph gave a very blunt and outspoken address, an assessment of the situation here in Memphis, the violation of free speech by Mr. Crump, quoting, I think, in his speech some of the remarks Mr. Crump had made about him. And he was enthusiastically applauded by his audience, which consisted primarily of colored people. I think there were a few white people there who were progressive in their thinking, some white newspaper reporters and some policemen, but I think that was the composition of the audience at that time.

CRAWFORD Do you know who warned Mr. Patton to cancel the first meeting?

R. CHURCH I don't know, but according to the colored press, I think that a group of colored leaders, including Mr. Patton, and some other ministers and some other people in the community were taken up to the county jail or city jail, and they were addressed by Attorney

General Gerber, I think, and somebody by the name of Crabtree who, I believe, was the city attorney. The police chief at that time was named Boyle. And I think those were the men who ordered them not to have Mr. Randolph speak in Memphis, and ostensibly their thinking was that if he came, he'd cause a race riot. I don't know where the message came from to these men, Gerber, Crabtree, and Boyle, although it is speculated that it came directly from Mr. Crump, because of the subsequent comments he made in the press about the whole thing. He supported these men, apparently, in this move to say Mr. Randolph should not speak here, and the press account would indicate that he was in accord with their techniques to stop Mr. Randolph's speech.

CRAWFORD He was able to bring pressure (or the city was able to bring pressure) on local groups, but he was not able to coerce national groups.

R. CHURCH Apparently not, especially the labor unions, you know. They considered Memphis a rather repressive area in that respect. I think there'd been some difficulty with the Crump administration and somebody from the CIO. During those years I recall somebody was in difficulty with the police department about organizing. I don't know what group it was here, but I think if one checked through that period of time, you'd see some difficulty with the labor unions and the Crump machine.



THIS IS THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE.
THIS PROJECT IS "THE ROBERT CHURCH FAMILY OF MEMPHIS." THIS
INTERVIEW IS NUMBER THREE ON JULY 10, 1973, WITH MS. ANNETTE CHURCH
AND MS. ROBERTA CHURCH IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY
DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MRS. SHARON HESSE.

CRAWFORD Ms. Church, let's discuss the developments of the period
around the year 1940, and I suppose we'll start with any
information you want about that time.

R. CHURCH Well, I think that my aunt could probably supply her
recollections, since she was actually on the scene at
that time, and could give you some information about the role some
of the local people played.

Now Auntie, I think you told me that Lt. Lee came by
to see you. [A. CHURCH: He did.] And talked about the Crump-Martin
situation and the whole business down here at that time. What do you
remember?

A. CHURCH He told me that he couldn't understand it, because
"the Colonel" (he called Robert the Colonel) was away,
and when he was away, Lt. Lee was always in charge.

R. CHURCH You mean when Papa, "the Colonel," was away, Lt. Lee
was in charge?

A. CHURCH Yes. But Dr. Martin was in charge now, and he couldn't
understand that.



R. CHURCH Was he annoyed? You told me he was.

A. CHURCH Yes, very much so. And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about that, Lieutenant." I said, "You know I don't know anything about that." And he said, "Well, I was always in charge of everything when he was out of town, but now Dr. Martin is in charge." And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about it."

Then Dr. Martin was to have a meeting at some church, and so Lt. Lee went up and told them about it--told the Crump people about it.

R. CHURCH Did somebody tell you that? How did you know that?

A. CHURCH I don't know how I knew, but anyhow I knew that he was having this meeting. And Lt. Lee went up and told Crump about it, and Crump said he couldn't have a meeting, because he'd police his drugstore if he had it.

CRAWFORD Why did he tell you they couldn't have the meeting?

A. CHURCH Because it was a Republican meeting, and it was colored people. And Lee was mad, because, you see, he wasn't in charge.

R. CHURCH I believe you told me he was pacing the floor in the living room when he was telling you this.

A. CHURCH He was walking all the time. [R. CHURCH: Very agitated.] Very, very angry. Every day or so he'd come back with something to tell me about what Dr. Martin had done.

R. CHURCH I believe you told me once that he told you that the reason

he thought that my father didn't put him in charge was because he was too close to Crump. Did he tell you that?

A. CHURCH Yes. He said that the reason that Dr. Martin was put in charge was because it was thought that he was too close to Crump. [R. CHURCH: That's Lee.] That's Lee. And I said, "Lt. Lee, I don't know anything about that."

And then I understand Crump sent him to tell Dr. Martin not to have that meeting at this church. And Dr. Martin said that Lee had come to tell him that Crump said that, so Lee was the man that he was sending around. And this was a Republican meeting of colored people at this church.

CRAWFORD Mr. Crump was forbidding them to meet and was sending Lt. Lee with the message?

A. CHURCH Yes. And if they went, why, he threatened he would police Dr. Martin's drugstore. He sent Lee to tell Dr. Martin that.

R. CHURCH Now I would like to say that I remember that my father told me he talked to Lt. Lee and Dr. Martin on the telephone and told them that he was selecting Dr. Martin to head up this campaign. He had Lt. Lee and Dr. Martin write him a letter and sign it that this selection was agreeable to both of them. But as you can tell from her remarks, it wasn't agreeable to Lt. Lee at all. He resented it, and didn't like it. So there is some conjecture (now I don't know whether this is true or not, but I have heard the point of view expressed around town) that his desire to head up the campaign itself resulted in his reporting about Dr. Martin heading it up in such a way that it made the

city administration take action that he didn't actually anticipate they were going to take. It went deeper than he thought it would. But he was expressing his resentment about not being selected and it all ended up in a terrible disaster. Now I don't know whether that's true or not, but I've heard that point of view expressed.

A. CHURCH Well, Dr. Martin told me himself that Lee was the one who came down and brought the message to him.

R. CHURCH Well, I'm talking about his expressing his opinion to the Crump organization and Gerber about Dr. Martin holding a meeting. I don't know about that, but that's a conjecture that has been expressed. But you told me that you went to see Gerber.

A. CHURCH I went to see Gerber after that to see him myself.

R. CHURCH Went about some kind of adjustment of the property, didn't you? [A. CHURCH: Yes.] And you saw Lee coming out of his office. [A. CHURCH: And I saw Lee come out of his office myself.] And Gerber wouldn't see you. [A. CHURCH: And he refused to talk with me.] But he talked to Lt. Lee.

CRAWFORD Was that during the fall of 1940?

A. CHURCH Well, I'm not sure.

R. CHURCH This was during the fall of 1940, because you left in November, and you were seeing him about that before you left, weren't you? [A. CHURCH: Yes. That's right.]

CRAWFORD How much had your father been in the habit of trusting Lt. Lee to manage things? Had he really been managing generally while your father was gone?

R. CHURCH Well now, I don't know about that.

A. CHURCH I don't know about that. I only know what Lee told me.

R. CHURCH That's what he said, that was his complaint. But my father ran things himself. Now, Lt. Lee and several other people around here were some of my father's staunch supporters. There was a Dr. West, who was an M.D. here, that was one of my father's loyal supporters, Dr. Martin, Wayman Wilkerson, Dr. Venson, and Lt. Lee, I think, was in there also, but they were all supporting him. Dr. Speight was also one of my father's supporters and Dr. Kitrell. They were all in there in these meetings with him. Now Lt. Lee played a part; they were all there together. But I think Lt. Lee tried to maximize his role over the others. And of course in later years the rest of them had gone from the scene.

A. CHURCH Well, I think Lt. Lee was a politician. The rest were all doctors.

R. CHURCH Well, Dr. Martin was a politician, but he was a pharmacist, you know.

A. CHURCH Yes, but I think Lee was a known politician.

R. CHURCH Well, that's true, but I'm trying to tell you that in his time, Dr. West was also (don't you remember?) secretary, I think, of Papa's organization. [A. CHURCH: Yes, I remember.]

R. CHURCH And he was also a member of the Primary Board, or something like that. And what I'm trying to say is Lt. Lee had a major role, but I don't know whether he, up until recent years, was of more prominence than the others, although he played a major part in it when the organization was larger before Roosevelt came into power. But I think my father entrusted him with certain things, yes, but I think my father was making the decisions, ordering the directions and planned the strategy, and saying you do this, and this one do that, and that one will do that, at all these conventions.

He had an integrated organization, and different people played various roles in it, but he was the man that planned all the strategy. Now, he operated behind the scene, to use the terminology that is used nowadays. He was not one that sought the limelight, you know, and he much preferred to be--how should I say it--the planner, the strategist. Not that he in later years was trying to avoid that role, but he was just a sort of a modest person, and he wasn't always trying to get out in front, you know, and do all these things. He liked to assign responsibility to other people, and I think he also thought that it gave them a break and some recognition too.

CRAWFORD Well, your father never, I believe, sought office for himself. [A. CHURCH: No.]

R. CHURCH Except in public office where he'd be elected to, for instance, the State Committee. And I think that was the only thing he sought, because at that time there wasn't much chance of him being elected to anything else in the Republican Party, you see.

When he ran for the State Committee or was supporting a Republican for any kind of elective office, they had to, in his time, be elected in Memphis and four counties: Shelby, Hardeman, Tipton, and Fayette, because the Tenth Congressional District comprised this. Now, there's a big difference in running in a district composed of seven or eight wards, and running city-wide and county-wide in a congressional district which is composed of four counties and the city of Memphis. Now you can realize the magnitude of an organization that he had to have to get elected.

And let us also remember that this was in the time you had to pay a poll tax. So that meant these people, and they were mostly colored people, were the backbone of his organization, although it was integrated. They did not have much education. They did not have the type of employment that they have nowadays, and it was quite a thing to get two dollars together to pay a poll tax, you know, and then come out to all these meetings at night and have motivation like they did. I think they deserve a lot of credit to be politically sophisticated enough to realize what they were doing way back there. So in a way, what you have today I don't know whether proportionately is even equal to what they were doing back there in that time, all other factors being considered.

CRAWFORD It seems then that it was much more difficult to me.

[R. CHURCH: I would think so.] I wonder about the very early period of the Crump influence in Memphis. Ms. Annette Church, your memory goes back far enough, I think, to cover that. Do you remember any changes that took place in the Crump period that were characteristic before in Memphis? [A. CHURCH: No, I do not.]

R. CHURCH Well, I think that you have to look at it in this way.

You told me about the fact that there used to be colored policemen in Memphis. [A. CHURCH: Oh, yes.] And there were colored people working...[A. CHURCH: Mr. Dick Wilson was a policeman.] Yes.

CRAWFORD Was that before the Crump era?

A. CHURCH Yes, before the Crump era.

R. CHURCH That's what he had reference to. And then you have told me about the colored people in city offices. You told me Mr. Settle was attorney general of Shelby County. [A. CHURCH: Yes, he was.] That was before Crump. And other people had positions in the city government. [A. CHURCH: That was before Crump.] Wharfmaster and coal inspector? [A. CHURCH: Wharfmaster.] There was that man Shaw, or something like that, you told me about...[A. CHURCH: Yes.] And the board of education--Mr. Savage who lived down the street from us was on it. [A. CHURCH: That's right.] And that's what Dr. Crawford has reference to, things like that. Now you also told me in some of this research you have done so simple an act of courtesy as calling colored people "Mr." and "Miss" and "Mrs." was always commonplace in the daily press in years gone by. Is that true?

A. CHURCH Yes, you can get newspapers like that and see for yourself.

R. CHURCH That was the practice. [A. CHURCH: Yes.]

CRAWFORD What about voting by colored people in that time? Was it usual before Crump came?

A. CHURCH Yes, my father ran for office, you know, before Crump came in. He didn't want to run. He declined it, but they insisted. He said he thought it was his duty and they insisted on it. That was in 1882.

CRAWFORD That was, of course, before Crump even came to Memphis.

A. CHURCH Yes, he ran for another position after they told him they thought it was his duty.

CRAWFORD It seems to me then that during the Crump era colored people's participation in Memphis declined. They didn't hold office any more. [A. CHURCH: No.]

CRAWFORD And they didn't have the positions they did before. Was there any change in their voting? Did they vote with any opposition? Did fewer of them vote?

A. CHURCH I don't know, because I was a child, you see.

R. CHURCH Well, I don't know about that either. You'll have to look at your election returns, I guess, for the Republican versus the Democratic vote. I would say that prior to Mr. Crump's arrival on the scene (and my opinion or impression is strictly from the research I have done), that quite a few of the colored people were voting the Republican ticket during that time. You must remember that this was right after the Civil War and up in the 1880's. I think it was just twenty years or so after the Civil War.

A. CHURCH I remember 1882. That's the election I know about. [R. CHURCH: Yes.] I read about it.

R. CHURCH And I think Mr. Crump came here and ran for mayor, I think, in--was it in 1912 or 1910 or something like that?

[A. CHURCH: I don't know.] I don't remember exactly; it was around that time.

CRAWFORD About that time, yes.

R. CHURCH So you see, up until he came here I think the aura of the Civil War and freedom hadn't receded from the scene so much, and they were inclined to vote the Republican ticket. And then, of course, maybe after he came here (and I am making conjecture) the influence was to prevail upon them to vote Democratic, because as my aunt has said, my grandfather was running for public office. He was colored and on the Republican ticket, and there may have been others that we don't know about. And so you had a city ticket composed of Republicans, or an integrated ticket, white and colored people, Republicans and Democrats, you see, but I don't think you had much of that any more after Mr. Crump came here.

[A. CHURCH: Oh, no.] You had my father's coming along, and of course he had certain activities, but they were not supporting any...[A. CHURCH: He never ran for office that I know about.] I know that, but I'm talking about my father's organization. He must have felt it was futile to try to have any colored people running for any kind of local position. When they ran that Lincoln League ticket the focus was on the state legislature and the Congress and the white people that were running for president and governor. But you see, in my grandfather's time before Mr. Crump came here, colored people were running for local office positions like he was. What was he running for...fire and police commissioner or

something like that...commissioner of public works, something like that. But I don't think you had that from my grandfather's time until the 1960's, you see. Any kind of office they ran for, and there were not many, excepting my father running for the state committee. In the 1960s they started running for the state legislature. The Democrats in the state I don't think have had any colored man be elected to the state committee.

CRAWFORD It seems to me that as far as colored people's holding office was concerned, things were set back for about half a century after the Crump influence started. [A. CHURCH: Yes.]

R. CHURCH I think you might make that observation, and I think that the facts would support it just by what's in the public print, in addition to her recollections and so forth.

CRAWFORD Do you happen to know the attitude of Mr. Crump or the Crump machine toward segregation?

R. CHURCH Well, I think we have to remember that when Mr. Crump was in his heyday, segregation was legal, you know. The Supreme Court decision which was the cornerstone of all this authorization of the desegregation process, see, wouldn't come for thirty or forty years later, until 1954, and I think that it was "separate but equal" that was adhered to. I don't recall Mr. Crump advocating any desegregation of anything. He would, as I recollect...[A. CHURCH: I don't either.] ...specify what he was doing for colored people with the schools and the hospitals and aid to the blind. But as I recall, it was always on a



segregated basis. I don't think he took any advocacy or leadership in trying to...[A. CHURCH: Oh, I don't remember anything.]...take any--making any policies of desegregation in the city to my knowledge.

CRAWFORD He came from Memphis from Marshall County, Mississippi.

[A. CHURCH: From Holly Springs, wasn't it, Holly Springs?]

Yes, ma'am. Holly Springs or near there.

R. CHURCH That's the same place my grandfather came from. What a coincidence! [A. CHURCH: That's right.]

CRAWFORD I hadn't realized the coincidence before.

A. CHURCH My father was born in Holly Springs in 1839.

CRAWFORD That was probably about the time that the Crump family moved to the Holly Springs area.

R. CHURCH I don't have much knowledge about their background prior to coming to Holly Springs and Memphis. All I remember is that the papers stressed the fact that he came from Holly Springs to Memphis, but where they were prior to that time, I don't know. You probably know more about that than I.

CRAWFORD I have read that. I don't remember, except that they were there at least a while before the Civil War, because his father, as I remember, had established a farm there. [R. CHURCH: Is that so?] And went, I think, into the Civil War soon afterwards, but died fairly soon afterwards, so that his wife, Mr. Crump's mother, raised him mainly.

R. CHURCH You asked the question about Mr. Crump and segregation.

Now when that episode happened in 1940 there was a colored paper in Nashville called the Nashville Globe--I don't think it's in existence now--that referred to the meeting between Mr. Gerber and I think it was Attorney Crabtree and the police commissioner. I think it referred to the fact that some of the colored leaders had gone to Mr. Crump to intercede for Dr. Martin when he was being persecuted by the Crump machine. They asked that some consideration be given to him because of his, you know, accomplishments and interest in the city. And that paper quoted these people as saying that Mr. Crump met with them and was quite--how shall I say it--incensed about the fact and verbally assaulted my father for going up north and stopping at white hotels...[A. CHURCH: Oh, yes.] Which he thought was the basis of preaching social equality and that Dr. Martin had aided and abetted him in it.

Now, that is, I think, an indication of Mr. Crump's feeling about this matter of segregation, because a hotel is about as impersonal a place as a supermarket or a bank. You've got to sleep somewhere at night, so you go sleep in a place that's clean and comfortable, you know. And ninety percent of the cities don't have any colored hotels in them anyway, and up north at that time there were none. You could stop in hotels, and that's where my father did. He'd go to national conventions or wherever it was--the headquarters of the Tennessee delegation--he'd stop in them, everybody would. But this, for some reason, annoyed Mr. Crump.

I can't imagine why, but that must be one of the indications of his racial feelings. And he interpreted that as meaning social equality, though I cannot see how stopping in a hotel can be social equality, because you don't even know who's in the room next to you, you know, or in the elevator or in the dining room or wherever. But that, you might say, according to this newspaper, was his stand, and they quoted him as saying that, and that's a matter of public print. So I'm not saying anything that wasn't publicized.

CRAWFORD Did you have any occasion to learn the attitude of any other members of the Crump regime as far as segregation or race relations?

R. CHURCH Well, I can remember Attorney General Gerber. Now, I don't know whether he was still attorney general when this happened. But this was in the 1950's, and I remember the Washington papers, the daily papers, publicizing the fact that he came up to Washington and was arguing against the desegregation of the schools. The Supreme Court decision had been passed, I think, or was imminent or something like that. I can't remember exactly whether he was presenting this point of view before the House of Representatives or some kind of committee that was discussing desegregation, or whether there was some kind of forum on it, or whether it was after Virginia entered its massive resistance plan, but anyway, he was in Washington and was well publicized in the papers that he was from Memphis and was advocating that segregation

be maintained. He was against desegregation. Now I don't know whether he was acting in his capacity as a private citizen and an attorney or a part of the city administration. I can't remember, but he was there and was outspoken. And I think that the daily newspapers and Time magazine, during Dr. Martin's difficulties, quoted freely the police commissioner at that time--what's his name--Joe Boyle. And I remember distinctly that Time magazine quoted Boyle as saying that Governor Prentice Cooper, who at one time Mr. Crump supported for office, was saying that this was "a white man's country," so I don't know what more you need to show the attitude of people during that time.

CRAWFORD That seemed to be the attitude then of the police commissioner?

R. CHURCH Well, according to what the newspaper and media said as they quoted him, that's what he said. And I don't recall that Mr. Crump ever came out and repudiated that attitude or point of view. I don't recall he ever criticized them for saying it or anything like that or presented a different point of view.

CRAWFORD I believe the police chief's comments usually represented the thoughts of Boss Crump.

R. CHURCH I imagine. I don't think it was possible to get in a position of power or prominence in Shelby County on any of the election boards or other commissions or police or park or whatever unless you had the clearance with Mr. Crump. I really don't think that was possible. He had to approve your appointment or people knew that he was not in opposition to you. I imagine it worked like that.



I remember that I came across some correspondence that my father had with an attorney down here in Memphis where he said that this Mr. Bruce, C. Arthur Bruce, could not have been appointed to the Shelby Election Board if Mr. Crump had not approved his appointment, which my father was criticizing because he did not think that the local Republicans should have any kind of an alignment or understanding with the Crump organization.

CRAWFORD Mr. Crump always seemed to feel that he had done a lot for colored people. What really did he do?

R. CHURCH Well, I have no knowledge of his personal contributions to charities. Maybe he had certain areas of interest that he liked to support; I would not know about that. Otherwise, when it came to functions or operations or positions that the city government would take in respect to health or schools or the fire department or other services that are given to the public by any municipality that the taxpayers support, I can't see where he did anything, because this was supported by the taxpayers, and they were paying for their own schools, and their policemen and their firemen and their health facilities. And because Memphis had, perhaps, good schools or a good fire department or a good health department or a good police department or a good whatever (I don't know whether the police department could be considered so good), but it seems to me a public service is a facility that any municipality provides for the taxpayers of the city. So I can't see why he'd claiming credit for that or that he's done anything at all other than the people are paying for themselves. And colored people pay taxes just like white

people. Now as I say, what his personal contributions were to various individuals or charities that benefit colored people, or colored people themselves, I don't know about. He might have been very charitable and generous in that direction, but I don't know about that. But as far as municipal services, I don't see where that's anything that he should take credit for.

CRAWFORD Do you know during the Crump era of any incidence of police brutality, oppression, or violence against colored people, and if so, do you know of any of which Boss Crump ever publicly disapproved?

A. CHURCH I can't remember anything.

R. CHURCH I can't remember his disapproving of anything. I think that when the heat was on with some incident that involved a colored person he let the police chief face the music. Now dispassionately I cannot say that he would order anybody to be physically abused--I try to be objective about these things--but there were such incidents on the part of the police department. It seems to me I can remember the case of a man, I think his name was George Brooks, I might not have that name correctly. And it seems to me he worked for the post office or something or other. But he was a person who had not been involved in any trouble. And either he had some minor traffic infraction or something. Perhaps it was mistaken identity. But he was, I think, very cruelly beaten up or abused or shot or killed or something. I don't remember.

And I remember that there were two or three incidents of that type that my father took upon himself to try to have rectified. I believe Mayor Overton was the mayor at the time, or somebody he knew

up there--to try to have some kind of consideration given the person if he had not been killed, to have his side be heard so he could get a fair trial.

Now I'm not trying to say that this was instigated by Mr. Crump at all, but these are incidents that occurred during his time he was in Memphis and in power, shall we say. I remember first of all that when I was a child someone shot in our second floor bedroom window. I can remember that very well, because my cousin was seated on the bed sewing and had just moved away and I was near her, and everybody said that she just moved away in time or else she would have been shot.

And I've heard my aunt say that there, at that time, was some tension in the city and that my father had been out trying to calm the waters, so to speak, and get people under control. And while he was out doing that, somebody shot through our house. They could never figure out how they could shoot into this second story window, unless they'd been in a tree somewhere, because they--We found a bullet, and the police said it came in the window, went through the closet door and ricocheted back on the floor. I remember the police saying it must have come from a very high-powered rifle. I remember my father coming home and saying that he was very, very, very upset and angry, because here he was out trying to keep people under control and his family was not being protected, or rather, his family was being abused.

I can also remember an incident of this bomb going off when he was making a speech at this political rally here in 1927, where the meeting was thrown into an uproar, I think, while he was speaking, and this was covered in the press. And I also remember a friend of ours...

Auntie, you remember Dr. Braithwaite that moved out on McLemore Avenue in the twenties, I guess it was? [A. CHURCH: Why, certainly.]

CRAWFORD What was his name?

R. CHURCH Dr. Braithwaite. He was our dentist, and he bought a home on McLemore between Mississippi and Neptune Street, on the south side of the street. The house that he moved into had quite a nice yard, and he wasn't too close to any white people. It wasn't jammed up like townhouses are. But they commenced to harass him, and I think they threw things on his porch or something or other, and they had quite a time. He was quite concerned about moving his family in this house. And I remember my father and this Dr. West, who was an M.D. who was a good friend of ours, and ran one of the very first and very good small, colored hospitals here, called the Mercy Hospital. It used to be located on Mississippi Avenue just before you get to the viaduct as you go south. My father and Dr. West went out and sat with Dr. Braithwaite all night for about two weeks to watch and see if they could catch the license number of any would-be vandals that would come there and try to destroy his property. [A. CHURCH: I remember that.] Do you remember that? And finally after that interlude they thought it was safe then to move his wife and children out there. And they lived there.

A. CHURCH Robert would go out there every night in the suburbs, wouldn't he?

R. CHURCH I remember they had licenses for pistols then. And they had shot in Dr. Braithwaite's house, and my father, Dr. West and Dr. Braithwaite were trying to catch these people. I'm sure they had no intent to kill anybody, because my father was not like that,



but I think if they'd had to use their guns they would have shot up into the air to frighten them or something like that. And they never had to use them, but they were there prepared to protect his life and all such as that.

Now, I've cited these incidents to show you that there was quite a bit of danger down here during these times. This was in the twenties and Mr. Crump was, as you know, a power in the community. And I have, as you have asked, never heard him come out against any of these things. Now, I'm not saying he had anything to do with them happening, but I've never heard that he came out against them. Now there might be something that I can't remember or have overlooked, but I don't recall anything like that. [A. CHURCH: I don't either.] Well, as we were talking about the members of my father's organization, I think you asked me about how influential Lt. Lee was. I told you, I think, that he was part of the organization and was active in it. And my father had certain, I guess you might say, assignments for different people to carry out, but my father was the one that planned all the strategy. I don't mean to say he didn't discuss the strategy with his constituents, but he was the one that usually thought of the ideas and plotted the whole thing. And as I said, different people would do different things.

Now I must say that to my knowledge my father befriended Lt. Lee in many, many different ways. He first came to Memphis, as I understand it from what Lt. Lee used to say, after the end of World War I, and I remember this from then. We didn't see him too much at home. Once in a while when my father had somebody to dinner that was in politics

or something, he'd invite him out, but most of the time my father's association with him was at his office, because the Atlanta Life Insurance Company occupied the second floor of my father's office building. But Lt. Lee would always come by to see us every Christmas night and visit for a while. And I remember that he used to be served refreshments, whatever we'd have, eggnog or a highball or whatever was around, and he would partake of them, and he would always reminisce about World War I and review his activity in these different battles of the Forest of the Argonne or wherever. This of course impressed me as a child, and I would remember this.

And I remember that he said that when he rose up to lieutenancy at the end of the war, he went home to Mississippi--I don't remember what town it was--but he told me that he was indebted to my father for his career with Atlanta Life Insurance Company. And he told me that at the end of World War I he was trying to get a job or trying to get located, and he was thinking about joining the staff of an insurance company in Chicago and that he had discussed this with my father. Seemingly, when he came to Memphis he gravitated to my father's office as did many people, because he was prominent and, you know, known, etc. And my father took the initiative and suggested that he stay in Memphis and had a friend named Herndon--Mr. Herndon who was president of Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Mr. Herndon's father and my grandfather had been friends. Mr. Herndon was a pioneer businessman in Atlanta, like my grandfather was in Memphis. I think my father knew that Atlanta Life wanted to establish a branch here, and he suggested to Mr. Herndon that



Lt. Lee be considered. And according to Lt. Lee, my father had Mr. Herndon come to Memphis to interview him, and he got the job, and that's the way he started his career with Atlanta Life.

Now when he wrote this book, Beale Street, he got 90 per cent of the material from my father and my great uncle, James Wright, and the employees of my father, like Dick Wilson and other people who had been around for years on Beale Street. And Auntie, at one time you remember James Weldon Johnson was in Memphis and came to our house to dinner. [A. CHURCH: Yes.] And you told me that Lt. Lee was looking for a publisher, and my father knew that Mr. Johnson had been a writer--had a lot of experience with book publishing and so forth--and so he told Mr. Johnson about this book. And I remember you told me the first thing Mr. Johnson said, "Well, if you write a book, don't tell anybody about it. Keep quiet about it until you get ready to get it published." And he agreed to assist Lt. Lee and got him in touch with a New York publisher, and that's how the book got published. So my father assisted him... [A. CHURCH: Beale Street?] Yes, that Beale Street Where the Blues Began. And my father, of course, when he joined his political organization assisted placing him in responsible positions and assignments. And then my father was responsible for him joining the Elks and being elected, whatever the official...[A. CHURCH: You know he didn't want to run.] Yes, he didn't want to run for Exalted Ruler of this Memphis lodge of the Elks, but my father told him, "Well, you go on and run, and I'll see that you're elected." And my father persuaded a young man here to withdraw, Taylor Hayes, who's the son of



T. H. Hayes and Sons, who was a friend of my grandfather's and my father's also. [A. CHURCH: He was an undertaker.] Yes. And Taylor was quite popular among the men and had a pretty good chance of heading it up, but my father thought he was a little too young. So he asked Taylor as a personal favor to him (my father) to withdraw, and my father put Lt. Lee's name before them. And since he was my father's choice, he got elected to head this Elk's organization in Memphis.

Well, as I've told you before, the Elks were prevented from functioning in Memphis and the whole state of Tennessee, because of the objections of the white Elks, and an injunction was lifted that stayed in effect from something like 1907 to 1937. And when it was lifted, that's when the organization got reactivated here, and Lt. Lee was made head of the local lodge with my father's support. And my father was quite active in recruiting people, because he wanted 1,000 members, I think, by the Grand Lodge Convention in 1938. And when they went to Baltimore, my aunt and I...you remember, Auntie, we were there at the time? [A. CHURCH: Yes, I remember.] I think Lt. Lee was crowned the outstanding local lodge ruler at the time. And out of respect for my father, the Grand Lodge made him a Past Grand Exalted Ruler because of his efforts in re-establishing the Elks in Memphis and the entire state of Tennessee and having it done at no cost to the Grand Lodge.

R. CHURCH I think there were only two states in the nation that had this difficulty, and that was New York and, I believe, Tennessee. And it cost the Grand Lodge thousands of dollars in legal fees to get the New York Elks reorganized.



A. CHURCH I want to tell you about this Lt. Lee. The Elks were, you know, prohibited from meeting in Memphis for thirty-seven years, and my brother knew the Exalted Ruler of the white Elks, and that's how it was restored.

R. CHURCH That man's name was Raymond Benjamin, and he was from California. He was very prominent in the Republican Party. And through friendship on the part of my father and Mr. Benjamin, my father interceded with him, and he got the injunction... [A. CHURCH: Lifted.] Starting getting it dissolved, or whatever you call it, and that's how they were able to function again in Tennessee. Then subsequently when the man who was Grand Secretary of the Elks died, the person who was head of the Department of Education was moved up to the Grand Secretary job, and the Department of Education job was left vacant. And my father supported it, and he's had it ever since. So, he's obligated to my father for that.

These are just some things I'm trying to review as to how my father befriended him. Now I'm quite sure that my father did not think that Lt. Lee had been a loyal friend to him for many years when the Crump organization moved in on him and Dr. Martin and Mr. Atkinson politically. And subsequently when my father was trying to be delegate from Memphis, because he thought he was entitled to that, Lt. Lee would be evasive and very noncommittal and would not commit himself at all, which I think my father greatly resented and thought he was not loyal. And I'm told some friends of mine that saw him in Washington just before my father came to Nashville and Memphis, that he said, "There is nothing worse than an ingrate." And he was referring to the way Lt. Lee had

treated him.

Now I would like to say Dr. Martin on the other hand, whom my father had not befriended as much, although he had gotten him this substation post office in his drug store, and befriended him in some personal matters involving his brothers, etc., but not nearly to the extent he befriended Lt. Lee, always stood by my father and stood by me when I was running for office down here in Memphis. And I remember when my father died suddenly down here in Memphis and we were in Chicago, Dr. Martin came by to see us. And he was a big man, about six feet two, weight about 200 pounds, you know, broad shoulders and so forth, very masculine, and I remember he lost his composure and he wept. And I remember getting him some Kleenex or something, and he apologized for that. But he was so affected by my father's death, he had that reaction. [A. CHURCH: He came down with us to the funeral.] He escorted us down here, and stood by us during the funeral. And we did not have Lt. Lee as a pallbearer, because we didn't think my father would have wanted it.

Now I'm also told that Mr. Randolph was greatly upset by my father's death. He had great affection for him. He has a heart condition. They were very close, and you know how men have bonds of affection between them. He was quite disturbed and distressed when my father passed away.

Now, that kind of brings us up to my running for office. Before my father passed away, he planned to run again for the state committee to which he'd been elected before for many years, because he wanted to sort of turn his organization in Memphis around and restore courageous leadership to it. And also he thought General Eisenhower had a pretty good chance of being elected president and securing the nomination of the Republican Party, and he wanted the organization he had founded



to take the lead in Tennessee in this.

Well now, we must remember this pitted him directly against Representative Reece, who was Mr. Taft's loyal advocate and was Mr. Taft's southern campaign manager. And if you remember the 1952 election, there was a square-off between Henry Cabot Lodge and Mr. Reece in the basement of some hotel in Chicago over the Texas delegation, which later swung to Eisenhower and got him the nomination. And my father was very friendly with Mr. Lodge and Representative Scott, who is now Senator Scott, who was Eisenhower's southern campaign manager. And this is how, I think, Representative Scott at the time knew so much about Mr. Reece and other southern Republicans' activities in alignment with the Democrats, since he was active in this campaign in the South, see, in those years.

So my father went to Nashville to the state convention with this Eisenhower emblem on, although it was Taft dominated, you must remember, because Mr. Reece was the national committeeman at that time. He wasn't chairman; he was just national committeeman. Since he was a congressman and there was no senator, the national committeeman usually ran the party in the state, if you remember that, and my father was pushing Eisenhower. Well, then my father came to Memphis.

And Mr. Reece was pushing Taft. Now Mr. Taft was a good friend of my father's and respected him. They respected each other. But Mr. Taft, in my father's view, was not as progressive on civil rights legislation as the men surrounding General Eisenhower, like Mr. Scott and Mr. Lodge and some others. Senator Ives, who'd been introducing these FEPC bills over the years was also a supporter of

General Eisenhower. And my father figured that if General Eisenhower got elected, these men would be prime movers in the policy of the party, and he thought they would be very active in trying to promote fair employment legislation that would affect colored people.

And he was proved right, because if you remember, the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction was passed in '57 after Mr. Eisenhower was elected, and Mr. Eisenhower subsequently called the troops to Little Rock to support the Supreme Court decision. So I think my father was proved right in the attitude of policy of the party during those years, that Mr. Eisenhower would be more progressive than Mr. Taft, so that was why he supported him, although Mr. Taft and he were good friends. But of course when he died there was a movement here for Gen. Eisenhower, and those people had been in touch with my father when he'd been here, about a week or so before he passed away. And they asked me to run in his place for the state committee. Well, this was quite a bombshell, because I had not been involved in any kind of political activity. But they told me that I bore his name, and I was young, and they thought that it would be something that would please him, and if I would do it, they would support me.

So I agreed to do so, but I also protected myself by getting the endorsement of Rep. Scott, whom I knew was a friend of my dad's. And I went to see him in person in Washington, and he gave me one of his cards (he was then a member of the House of Representatives), and he wrote in longhand on the back of it, "I am for Miss Roberta Church," and signed it Hugh Scott, although it was engraved with the congressional

insignia. I think I still have it, and I'll show it to you in a minute. And that was, I thought, the proper thing to do, since I was undertaking this task, to be cleared by him, who was southern, the southern campaign manager. And he also wrote a letter down here, I believe, to Mr. Fitzhugh--Millsaps Fitzhugh, who was at that time interested in Eisenhower--and indicated that he was interested in my candidacy for the state committee post and would, you know, approve it.

So we ran for office, myself and the other woman, who was Mrs. McClure, Mrs. Arch McClure, who was the wife of one of the officials of the Quaker Oats Company and the nephew of R. Douglas Stuart, who at the time was president of Quaker Oats and was treasurer of the Republican National Committee, and a gentleman by the name of Mr. Allan Redd, who owned the United Paint Company, and a man who at the time was a Republican named Hugh Bosworth, who was president of, I think, an industrial plant at the time called Bos., Inc. But I think he's since left the Republicans, but at that time he was in the party. We ran for the state committee, and we went to rallies.

And we had this broadcast on WMC-TV which was the first time an integrated TV broadcast had been made over the station, and there was all this discussion about whether or not we should have it, but they decided to go ahead. And they were most gracious to us. I remember my aunt was up listening to the broadcast in the offices of... I think it was Mr. Ahlgren, who was the president or editor of the Commercial Appeal at that time, and they had all these refreshments and everything. And the broadcast came off very well. And I don't want to be immodest, but Mr. Fitzhugh said that some people told him that I was the best person on the broadcast.



And so it ended up with us running for office, and I was the only one elected, with which I was disappointed, because I would like to have seen the whole ticket elected. But they told me that paid some tribute to my father, because I was pulling from all segments of the population. And I realize they were not voting for me, but they were sympathetic with my dad.

I think I must mention that Mr. Brenner, who was a member of my father's organization, turned against me and called Dr. Martin up in Chicago and asked him to persuade me not to run, because I was going to get badly beaten. Dr. Martin said, "Well, if she's going to get badly beaten, why are you worried about her running?" Then I got an anonymous letter from somebody telling me that I was going to do things that would bring my father great distress if he were living, because he wouldn't be aligned with such people.

And then I was told by Mr. Lumpkin, who operated Lumpkin's Hotel on the corner of Vance and Orleans where we stopped when we were in Memphis and which was my political headquarters, that he signed my father's petition. You had to have a petition of thirty-five names, I believe, circulated before you could get on the ballot and file with the state offices. He signed my father's petition, and two or three other men in his hotel signed it together with other people. And this petition was being circulated the day my father died, and I don't think everybody knew about it. But when it all came out in the papers afterwards and news got around who signed it, and according to Mr. Lumpkin, Lt. Lee called him and two or three other people (I don't remember their names, but Mr. Lumpkin knew them) down to his office



and asked them what they meant by signing my father's petition over him, since he was going to be a candidate for the state committee. And according to Mr. Lumpkin, he threatened them and told Mr. Lumpkin that if he didn't cooperate with him, he'd see to it that his hotel was raided and closed up. And Mr. Lumpkin told me, "Now, I told him that I could go in business anywhere, and I wasn't ashamed to sign any kind of petition for Mr. Church and I'd do it again."

And then after I got elected they had a woman named Mrs. Hanover try to contest my election. And that was unsuccessful, because the state committee voted to seat me instead of her. She was, I think, the woman that lost out. We weren't running against each other, but she got fewer votes than I, and if I had not been higher than she, she would have gotten the spot. So she was the one that the opposition chose to contest me.

And Mr. Brenner was trying to get some kind of a statement from Mr. Lumpkin to discredit me. I forgot what it was, but Mr. Lumpkin refused to sign it, because he said it wasn't honest, and he didn't know why Mr. Brenner was so interested in getting something from him. But there was a whole lot of activity and dynamics and intrigue going on about this election.

So then I got elected, and I went to Nashville and I got sworn in, and Lt. Lee greeted me up in Nashville, and I was polite to him. And that office, of course, was...there was no salary to it. It was just a state office that was an unsalaried position. And subsequently I got appointed minority groups consultant with the Department of Labor. And Lt. Lee came out in the paper and said he'd endorsed me for this job.



Well, I did not solicit his endorsement, and I don't know anything about it.

A. CHURCH He never congratulated you for being elected.

R. CHURCH I know it. I never even solicited an endorsement from Mr. Reece, because I thought Mr. Reece was, you know, with the other side, the Taft people. And I had endorsements from everybody else, though, that was of substance. I had endorsements from Representative Scott and Ambassador Lodge, Clare Booth Luce, Senator Baker's father, who at that time was Representative Baker. I had an endorsement from the two people in Illinois whom I knew, Mrs. Wesley Dixon, who was national committee woman, and ex-Senator Brook from Illinois, who was national committeeman. And I had endorsements from Dr. Martin and, oh, many other people. In fact, the people at the White House told me I had enough endorsements to carry me to heaven.

So I got this appointment, and I had to resign from the state committee on account of the conflict, you see, from the federal appointment. But I served at the Labor Department. I was appointed minority groups consultant there and I served during the duration of the Eisenhower years. I must say that it was a very enjoyable experience; I found it challenging. And I was carrying out the enforcement of discrimination in federal contracts that were awarded by the federal agencies to see that fair employment practices were observed and also through the federal-state employment service and various industries, and we worked with the unions. And I think about ten states at that time had state FEP laws, and we worked with them.

And I had a very nice experience, because I went in with Secretary Durkin, but he left the Labor Department, and Secretary Mitchell was appointed. And he appointed me as liaison with the...what they did call the President's Committee on Government Contracts, which at that time was chaired by Vice President Nixon, and Secretary Mitchell was the vice chairman. So I got to go to that meeting every month and see Mr. Nixon every month during the time he was vice president.

And there are two experiences, if I may, I'd like to relate to you. One of them is, I think, humorous, and the other one something I don't think everybody else has the opportunity to do. Well, the first one is that one day after the meeting, which was in the Secretary's conference room on the third floor of the Labor Department, I had to go upstairs to my office, which was on the fifth floor. And I left early, because I was in a hurry. And as I pushed the elevator button up, who was coming down the hall in rapid strides behind me but Vice President Nixon. See, my office is on the fifth floor, and I'm trying to go up, and he's trying to go down. Well, as he approached me he said, "Is this elevator going down?" and I said "Yes," forgetting that I had pushed the button going up. So we get in the elevator and I was so, I guess, nonplused over talking with him, I forgot to tell him we were going up. So here we go up. He thinks he's going down, you see, but he never turned a hair, and he continued to talk to me. And I finally got the buttons reorganized--it was a self-service elevator--and got him on the ground floor. And that I also remember, because I was so embarrassed at my confusion, you know,

and consternation, but he never seemed bothered about it. At that time he was by himself; he wasn't with any secret service people, because he was inside a federal building. But I always remember that. I don't know whether he would or not, but that is something I'll always remember. It was one of my most embarrassing moments--I guess my most embarrassing moment.

And the other thing that was, I think, quite an event in my life was Secretary Mitchell and Mr. Nixon were trying to establish regional offices of this committee to oversee the fair employment practices of the government contracts in different areas. And we flew to California with the committee in the president's jet, "the Columbine," and I don't think everybody has an opportunity to do that. It was President Eisenhower's plane. And we met Mr. Nixon in California, and various members of the committee went on that trip. I remember John Roosevelt was a member of the committee--he was the one Roosevelt who was a Republican--and Mrs. Ogden Reid, who was, I think, chairman of the board of the New York Herald Tribune at the time, and Mrs. George L. P. Weaver, who was a prominent colored labor leader with AFL-CIO, and some others, but I remember those names. And I always remember that as a very wonderful event in my life. And we had full access of the plane; they even let us walk up to sit with the pilot, who was a Major Dooley. I always remember that, and I told him I was from Memphis. And he said, "Well, when I get over Tennessee (I'm flying south to avoid the weather) and get in the direction of Memphis, I'll tip the wing." I said, "You do that." And he did. So I shall always remember that.

And then I also remember that the Ebony magazine wanted to do a spread on me, and I gave them permission to do this. And they wanted some pictures of me and high government officials, and I had the opportunity to have my picture taken with Mr. Nixon, who was then vice president. And I took with me my grandfather's badge which he wore to the convention which nominated William McKinley. And I have a picture that was taken of me showing this badge to Vice President Nixon that my grandfather wore in...What was that, 1900? [A. CHURCH: 1900.] ...when he was a delegate from Tennessee, Memphis, to nominate William McKinley. So I remember those episodes that I think may be of interest.

Well, I think that we've covered a lot of material, but I would like to mention for the record that my aunt and I are the last members of the family bearing the name Church. And of course my grandfather was married twice and had a son and a daughter by each marriage, but, Auntie, the half-brother named Ayres...

A. CHURCH He never got married.

R. CHURCH He was a bachelor; he never married. And he died, I think, in the thirties, didn't he? 1936 or 1937.

[A. CHURCH: I forgot.] I think it was around that time, because I was in college at the time, I can remember that. So the only survivors bearing the name of Church are my aunt and myself. And my Aunt Mollie (Mary Church Terrell) has one daughter, but her name is Phyllis Terrell Langston, and she has no children, so that's all that is left.

Now, I would like to make one other observation or comment about my father. And that is that I think that, as I told you before, one thing I would like to emphasize regarding this property situation in



Memphis is that if there was any kind of delinquency he had in his taxes, it was because of the exorbitant assessment that was made on it that made it impossible for him to keep up with them. We referred to that before, but I would like to have that mentioned again for the record.

And the other thing is (I have mentioned before) that he never became embittered, but he always went ahead and faced disaster like a man and a gentleman. I think that that is something that should be remembered. He didn't let it get him down, although it must have been very, very difficult for him, but he went right ahead.

And I think that of all the tributes that were paid to him when he passed away, the ones that would have pleased him the most were first of all the tribute that was paid to him in his hometown newspaper, the Commercial Appeal, which I thought gave a very fine recollection and review of his life and had it on the front page and had a picture of him on page two. And I think that's about the first time they ever had a photograph of a colored person of his stature in there. Now, I don't know about that; I think I'll take that back--and let's say in recent years, because they used to publish things about my grandfather, I know, and possibly others, but in recent times, let's put it that way. And the one sentence in particular in that write-up in the Commercial that I think would have brought him great satisfaction was the reference to the fact that his associates said that he had never been known to use profanity or vulgar words.

I think that would have brought him great satisfaction, as well as the editorial that appeared in a colored newspaper (the



Pittsburgh Courier), that was written after he died, called "The Gentleman from Memphis" in which they paid tribute to his courtly manners, as well as his political career, but particularly to his gentlemanly manners and conduct. And the reason, I think, that this would have brought him great satisfaction was because I think that he would have thought it reflected on the type of mother and father he had, and the type of home he had been reared in, to be brought up to be a gentleman and have refinement and gentlemanly conduct. And I think that he would have been proud, because that would have reflected favorably on his parents.

I might say in that respect, while I am talking about these tributes to my father (his being pleased with them, because they reflected on his mother and father and the way he had been reared), I would like to mention an incident to illustrate his gentlemanly conduct. I recall him talking about in the 1930s there was a man who was chairman of the Republican National Committee named John Hamilton, who'd been, I think, appointed chairman when Governor Landon was running for president. And my father was very outspoken, as you know, in regards to the treatment of colored voters and the kind of policies he thought the Republican Party should take. I really think he thought that since the era of Mr. Will Hayes the Party had not had a very strong position on colored Republicans and the activity of colored people in the Party. And he had given some statements to the press that had been critical, and I am sure he had done it in a constructive way, of some of the policies the party was operating under Chairman Hamilton.

So he and another colored Republican, I don't remember who it was, had an appointment to see Mr. Hamilton in Washington on some occasion about some matter. And I remember my father coming home and



saying that he went into Mr. Hamilton's office, and to quote my father, he said, "Hamilton said those statements you have been giving to the colored press have been eating the so and so out of me." Now, I don't know what he meant by so and so, but those are the words my father used. But I imagine it must have been something that was off-color. And my father said that he told Mr. Hamilton, "Well, Mr. Chairman, I've been a member of the Republican Party for years and years, and I've been talking with members and chairmen of the Republican National Committee ever since 1912, and you're the first man that I have ever heard that would use such language in talking from one gentleman to another." And he said that Mr. Hamilton apologized to him. But I cite that instance as an example of the standards he set for himself and his conduct. I thought it might be interesting.







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